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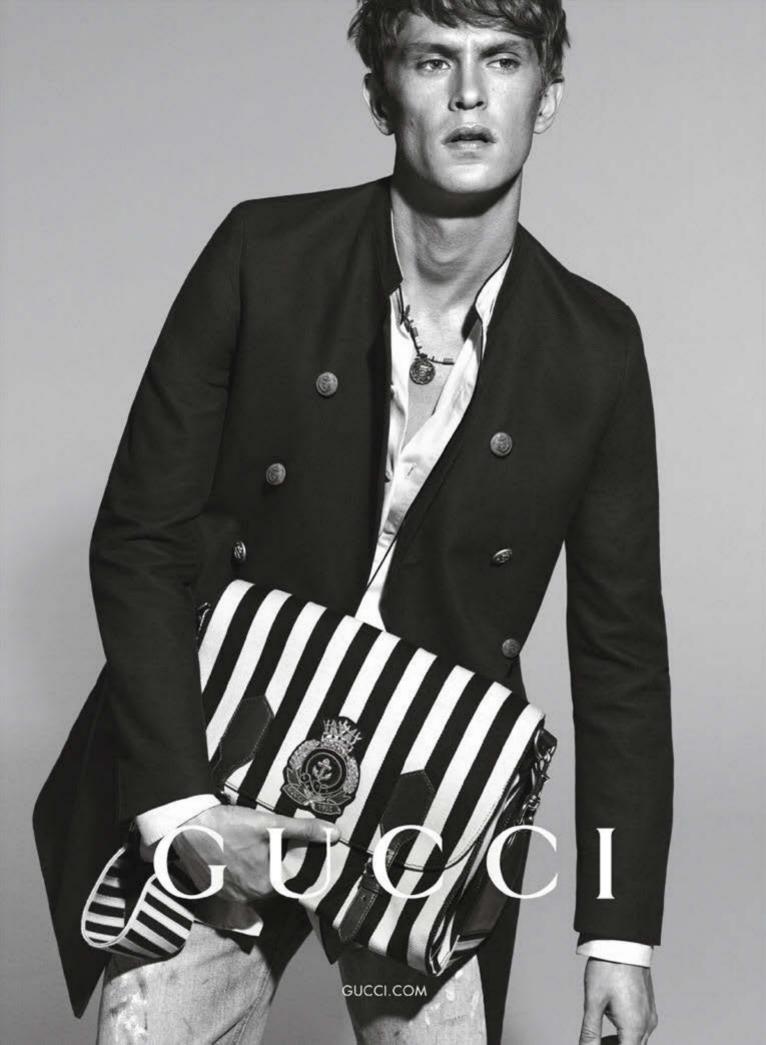
Opening Ceremony - New York/Los Angeles

Dover Street Market - New York, The Webster - Miami









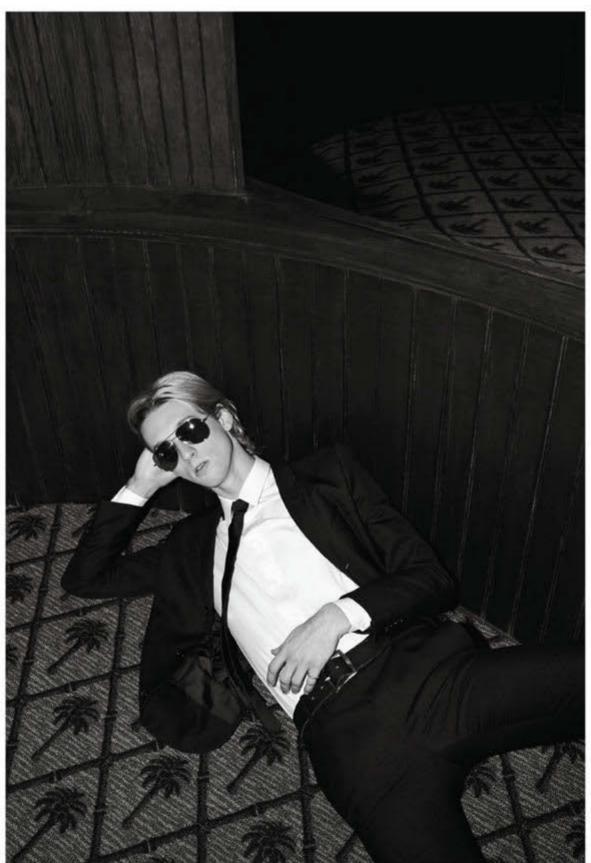




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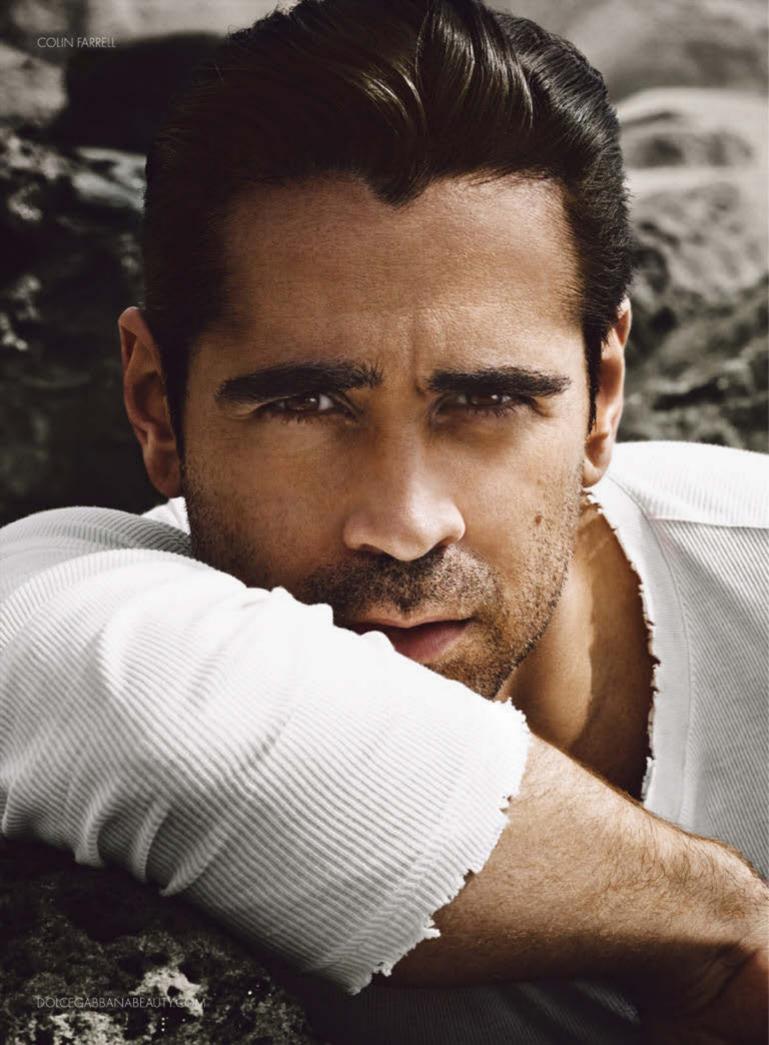
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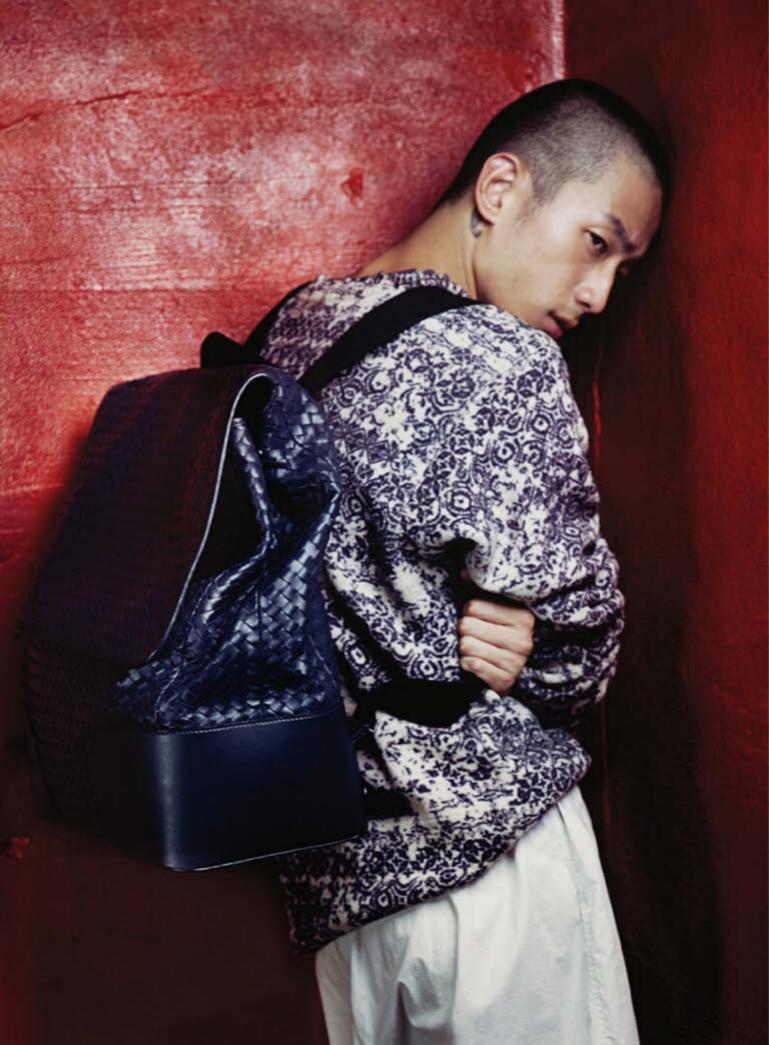
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THE NEW FRAGRANCE FOR MEN







MILANO 19:00



BE YOUR OWN STYLE 24:07



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VERSACE

















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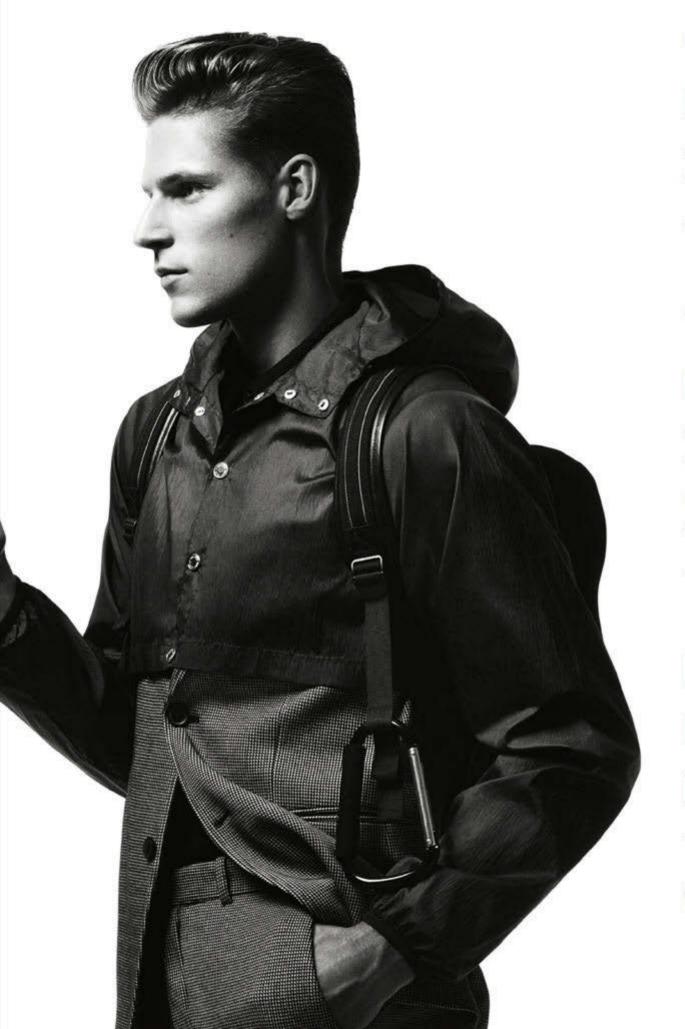


Footwear, Apparel & Accessories for Every Escape. #inmyelement

Modern Essentials selected by DAVID BECKHAM







VERY PERRY Ш L L S

GMarch

PAGE 1/3



Letter from the Editor

70 The Reaction

Manual

The Style Guy

bracket-battle

Parting Shot The NCAA Tournament of Dickbags—i.e., the co-workers you'll



GQ Intelligence

The Punch List

Our cheat sheet to what you need to see, hear, and read this month, from Vince Vaughn on the comeback trail to the only thing Björk and Frank Sinatra have in common

116 The Reddest Carpet: I Survived the North Korean Film Festival

The Interview isn't the only flick causing a ruckus in North Korea. MITCH MOXLEY heads to the Hermit Kingdom for a weeklong propaganda-filled fest

The Secret to Success Is Saying "I Quit": 25 Rules for How to Do It Right

Sometimes quitters do win. Here's how to say "Enough!" to everything from a troubled marriage to the Chicago Cubs

142 Are You Man Enough for the Men's Rights Movement?

For a certain kind of guy, feminism marks the darkest moment in modern times. JEFF SHARLET spends a weekend with the men (and a few ladies) leading the, uh, regression

Kobe Bryant has towered over the competition for nineteen seasons.

Jacket, \$2,850, sweater, \$780, and jeans, \$530, by Gucci. Sneakers, \$90, by Nike. Belt by Tom

PEGGY SIROTA

MIAMI Design District - LAS VEGAS Wynn - NEW YORK Madison Avenue (coming soon) - www.givenchy.com





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Features

The Perfect Night Out: GQ's 25 Most Outstanding Restaurants of 2015

ALAN RICHMAN eats his way across the U.S. to find your next great meal. Be thankful

Your New Excuse for a Hidmight 12:37 Snack This month, British funnyman James Corden

takes over CBS's Late Late Show. Imagine John Oliver crossbred with Chris Farley BY SARAH BALL

ACCIDENTS AND AFTERMATH

→ The Vanishing

Malaysia Airlines 370 disappeared twelve months ago and still hasn't been found. SEAN FLYNN meets the searchers, specialists, and family members trying to crack aviation's greatest unsolved mystery

→ The Accident

Senior year of high school, a deadly car wreck cracked up the lives of the writer and his friends. Thirty-four years later, they're still putting the pieces back together BY MICHAEL PATERNITI

Fashion

174 All Caps

The once stodgy cap-toe shoe is ready to hit the town

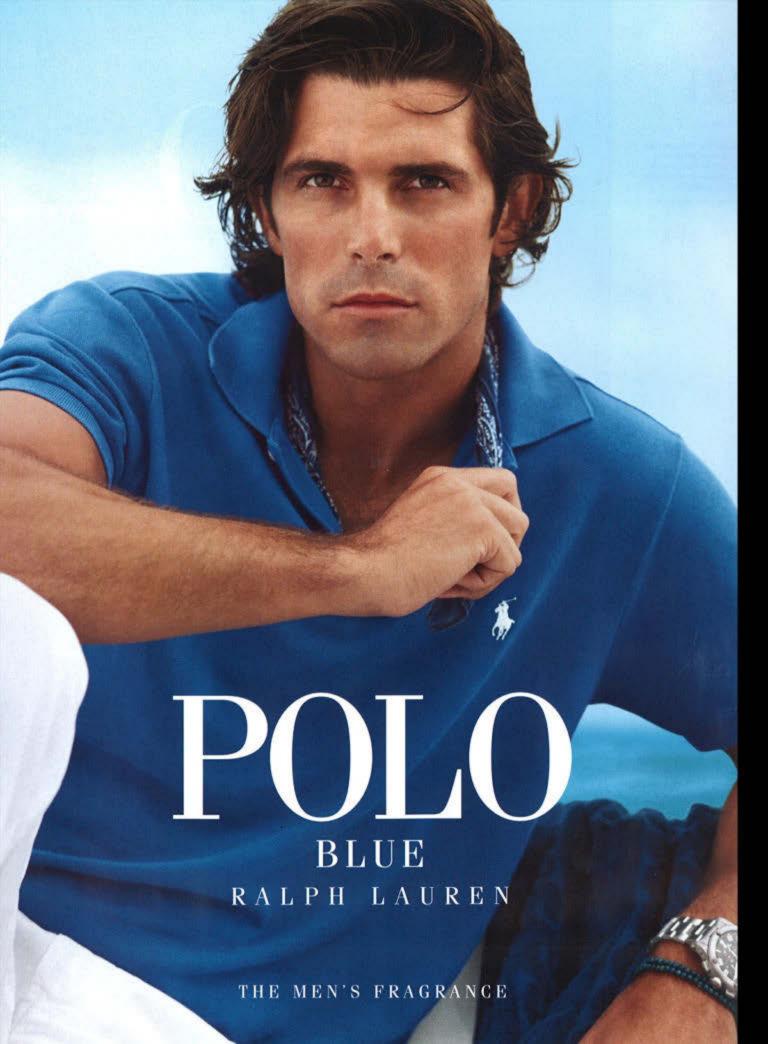
You'll Never Look Funny in These Clothes

All-American designer Todd Snyder is always reliable, and his best collection yet is out now. We had him outfit the latest roster of guys on SNL

The Most Interesting Hombre in el Mundo

Bullfighter José María Manzanares slays it (sorry) by wearing the swanky clothes of fashion power duo Dolce & Gabbana

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THE MEN'S FRAGRANCE BY RALPH LAUREN

INTRODUCING



An all-new space that brings GQ to life through the spirit of the modern gentleman.

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Peggy Sirota



On Kobe Bryant
Suit, \$895, by Boss.
T-shirt, \$390, by Tom Ford.
Watch by Hublot. Necklace
by Werkstatt: München.
Grooming by Hee Soo Kwon
for Malin+Goetz. Prop styling
by Julia A.M. Bauerfeind
for Bauerfeind Productions-



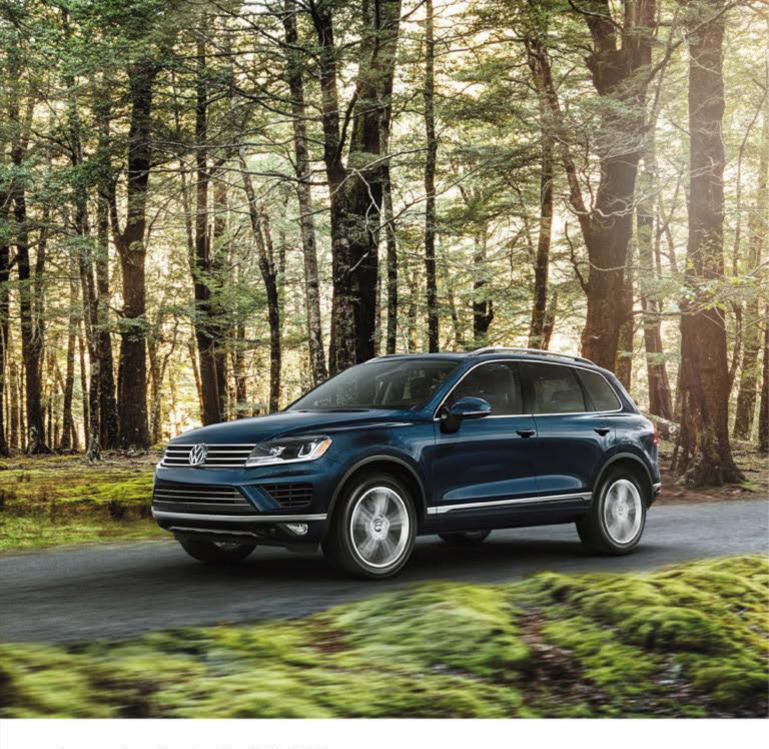
On Kevin Love
Suit, \$5,690, and shirt, \$630,
by Tom Ford. Tie, \$135,
by Giorgio Armani. Hair
by Thom Priano at Garren New
York for R+Co. Grooming by
Sussy Campos. Prop styling by
Kyle Laughlin for Bauerfeind



On Kevin Durant
Custom-made suit, \$2,800, by Martin Greenfield
Clothiers, Brooklyn, N.Y.
Shirt, \$148, by Albiate for
J.Crew. Tie, \$85, by Polo
Ralph Lauren. Shoes, \$175, by Johnston & Murphy.
Socks by Pantherella. Tie
bar and pocket square (also above) by The Tie Bar. Hair
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by Sussy Campos. Prop
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page to page 193 available?
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directories to find out. All prices
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Spring Trends



Which do you need in your closet right now?

- A. TRACK JACKET
- **B.** DENIM JACKET
- C. FLIGHT JACKET
- D. SAFARI JACKET
- E. ALL OF THE ABOVE
- → Check out **GQ.COM/SPRING-TRENDS** for the correct answer.

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estate, luxury goods, and more fine things with *GQ'*s resident connoisseur, **2 Chainz.**

Time for Another Binge



"THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING OF MY REVENGE"

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OUR GUIDE TO BUYING A SUIT ONLINEArmed with this guide, you can click "add to cart" with confidence. **GQ.COM/STYLE**



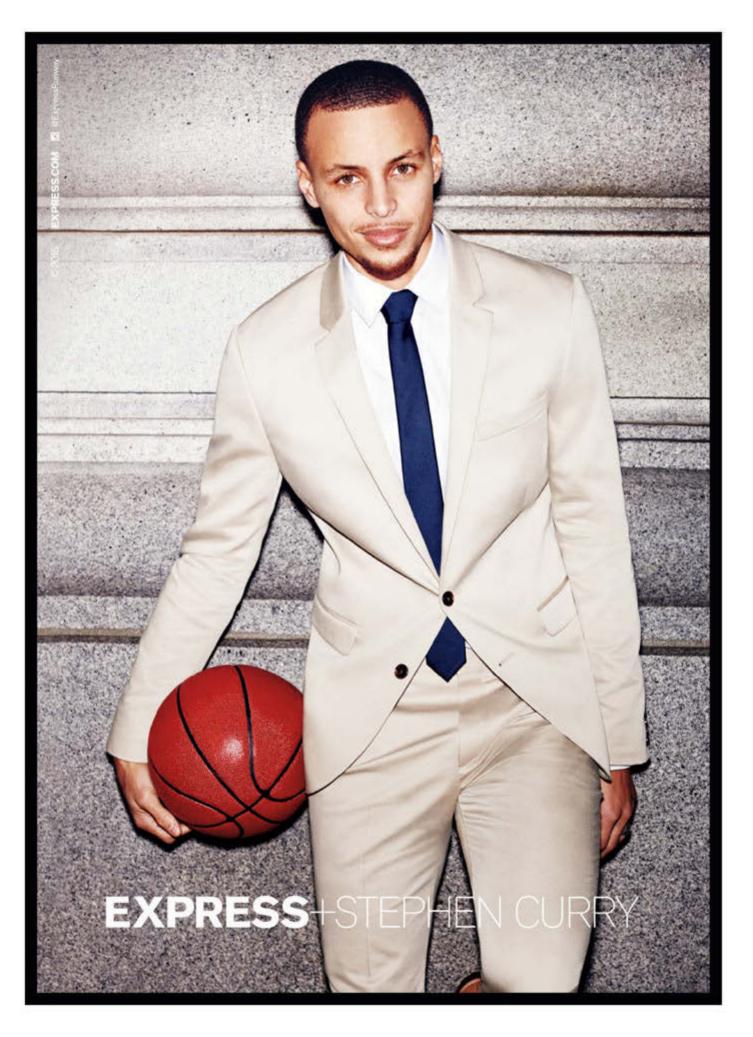
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Hate the Court, Love the Justice



could use some help with their big upcoming gay-marriage decision. This is the historic one, the legal showdown we've all been waiting for, in which the Justices have agreed to decide once and for all whether the Constitution guarantees a right to marriage. It's a tough one! They have to decide whether some people have the same rights as everyone else. See, I thought we had figured that one out a long time ago. It's kind of the definition of justice. But, all right, let's do it again!

Lately, conservatives like Mike Huckabee are dialing up the rhetoric. They're all lathered up about the issue, saying that if the Court approves gay marriage, they will kick and scream and put up a fight because the Justices aren't the boss of everyone.

Drama queens.

In times like these, you need somebody who can take in the overheated arguments from both sides and try to be fair and just sorta morally bisexual about it. I'll give it a try!

So, in the spirit of solving culturally divisive legal issues, I hereby submit my amicus brief to the Supreme Court.

Dear Supreme Court Hall of Justice Superheroes,

What's up? You don't know me from Adam and Steve, and I'm sure you must get a lot of these, but first of all I just want to say: Huge fan of your work. Especially your early work. That Marbury v. Madison shit was dope. And don't even get me started on Griswold v. Connecticut!

Anyway: the gays! Always asking for something, right? At first they wanted not to be imprisoned for consensual sex. Now they want you to dance and be happy at their amazing, color-coordinated wedding ceremonies. What's next? A constitutional right to foam parties?

But look at things from their side for a minute. For gays, this is not just another court case. This is The Ultimate Case: Final Justice, because fundamental rights and recognition are at stake. Yes, I used the F-word. Remember, way back when, during the gay-hatin' Reagan years, how those rights were always derided as "special"—people would whine, "Why do they need special rights? Waaaa!" Notice how you don't hear the "special" slur so much anymore? That's because, after the public looked into it a little, they turned out to be just...rights.

(Also, marriage: Not always that special!) My dear Justices, esteemed members of the Court, and sad, lonely stenographer person...in the coming weeks, you will hear every kind of argument imaginable thrown against the wall in this case, but most of them will fall along familiar lines of surly status quo-ism and badly wired moral outrage, and some will be just people saying dumb shit.

Like, the other day I read about a lawyer for something called the Alliance Defending Freedom, a hard-core antigay-marriage group. (Can you imagine what hard-core anti-gay-porn looks like?) He issued the kind of hyperbolic call to action that so-called freedom lovers love but which isn't really about freedom at all.

"The people of every state," he declared, "should remain free to affirm

marriage as the union of a man and a woman in their laws."

You will hear that one a lot, the defiant states'-rights freedom song. May it please the Court if I call bullshit on this, too? First, it's a classic case of obverse logic, and also a pretty sad and twisted definition of freedom. It's the Orwellian freedom to keep other people un-free. I believe the slave states once enjoyed such freedoms!

It reminds me of how a dear relative (hi, Aunt Gertie!) always used to say to me, in describing how she could justify being an unrepentant homophobe: "Hate the sin, love the sinner." She was a nice lady who smelled of stale talcum powder and Christian piety, but the line always bugged me for its self-satisfied ring and its moral convenience, the license it gave her to stop thinking about something so vital to so many others. It's like: "Well, I guess I figured that one out!" No, you did not. You can't dismiss someone's character and elevate your own in six words.

Nor can you carve out the part of someone that defines him, his love, his life, and discard it with a slogan you found on Facebook. You still love as you hate? How can you hate the essential character of someone and pretend to love him?

You cannot, my Lords and Lassies! (Sorry if no one calls you that.)
But seriously, do you understand
the power in your hands? The power to
make the right call? (Scalia, dawg, I'm
talking to you.) And what is so hard about
the call? The rights are so transparently
fundamental that waiting for this decision
is like waiting for someone to issue a decree
confirming that you are, in fact, human.

Basic. Human. Rights. Call it the right to self-determination. It's so embedded in our character, so dear to our values, we went to war and beat up British people over it.

Let's do it again! (Without hurting British people.)

I rest my case.

THE RIGHT HONORABLE

JIM NELSON

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF





EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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OCTOBER 2014 LOS ANGELES

$GQ \times$ Northern Grade

GQ and Northern Grade teamed up to create a men's pop-up market of American-made goods at the CNTRL studios in Downtown Los Angeles. The market brought together some of the hottest brands made in the USA, including Apolis, Miansai, Almond Surfboards & Designs, Owen & Fred, Rogue Territory, and more. GQ set up headquarters at the popup, combining the best of style, food, art, and culture. Sponsors included Ben & Jerry's, Dyson, Gillette Clear Gel, MTM | Special Ops Watch, and The Art of Shaving.



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Update: "Leonardo DiCaprio's Year in Leisure"

→ In a year-end GQ.com post, we captured every last instance of modelpillaging and yacht karate that defined Leo's 2014. Looks like 2015 is lining up to be just as epic. His New Year's Day was spent on a St. Bart's beach where the F-to-M ratio steadied at 100:1.



All the Things We Can See from Our Brand-Spanking-New Office

- → After fifteen years in the Elmochoked hothouse of Times Square, we just moved to 1 World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan. It comes with views of the following:
- Freedom
- The magnificent glow of the setting sun over the trash

- plains of North Jersey (see above)
- Goldman junior analysts with pricey, ill-fitting suits
- Three of the five boroughs-four if you include "Newer" Jersey
- A Ukrainian couple making out on the edge of the 9/11 Memorial
- The Statue of Liberty

The Week of:

- → Well, almost a week. From January 8 through 13, the mosttrafficked stories on GQ.com found an organic theme. Can we thank carnal New Year's resolutions? Nah, probably iust back-towork boredom.
- 1/8: "My Hard-Core Obsession" by Shalom Auslander 1/9-10: "A Guy with a 12-Inch Penis Did a Reddit AMA" by Freddie Campion 1/11: "Introducing Yelp for Sex Positions" by Scott Rothman and Mike Sacks 1/12: "We Should All Thank Allison Williams for Our Buttplay Freedom" by Julieanne Smolinski 1/13: "Wife Reportedly Chops Off Husband's Penis, Twice" by John Jannuzzi

(Yikes!)

ders' Choice

America's 20 Craziest

Politicians

- →Our January list of the most mixed-up elected officials in the U.S. was 85 percent Republican. Our conservative-leaning readers made fast work of trying to tip the scale the other way.
- → "Dianne Feinstein gave a lecture on how normal people should not have guns. She is a gun owner."—crazy_ kizmet via GQ.com
- "No Elizabeth Warren being 1/32 Indian?"—boblaw via GQ.com
- "Eric Holder watches the misery of 50,000 heroin addicts in Baltimore but doesn't give a damn, and sends FBI agents to Ferguson to convict an innocent police officer. He's too crazy to control the border over which heroin is transported to Baltimore." -AIEmc2 via GQ.com
- On Obama: "How'd you manage not to include the genius who regaled us with tales of
- campaigning in 57 states?" -cbensenhav via GQ.com
- On Debbie Wasserman Schultz, regarding her comments about Scott Walker's abortion views: "Compared Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker to a wife-beater." —Kyle Smith, the New York Post "Nancy Pelosi
- and Maxine Waters are crazy as bedbugs." -hombre41 via GQ.com



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* And a Few Choice **Words for GQ Magazine**

→ "You've proven your Libtard bias so thoroughly, you can fold your tent now and slink away. A disgusting waste of trees." -Michael Geer via e-mail

LETTERS MAY BE EDITED.

• "There are some 'off the rails' Repubs, but Dems take the cake. If your staff weren't such yellow-dog Dems you could figure this out."—Daniel Gremillion via e-mail

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A Work Bag That Keeps You Strapped

A bag with just one strap hasn't been seen on stylish shoulders in years, so why now? Because the cool finally caught up to the utility. No more industrial nylon or NASA-grade hardware. Now we're slinging on bags of buttery soft leather and beat-it-up canvas, each with simple flap-and-buckle closures. You get hands-free functionality and plenty of stash spots inside, plus the satisfaction of knowing that bag trends tend to last awhile (unlike the great Hawaiian-Shirt Infatuation of 2014). So go ahead and spend a little, or a little more, since you won't want to kill these messengers anytime soon.—JIM MOORE

Bags, clockwise from left: Louis Vuitton \$3,850 | Sandqvist \$213 | Gucci \$2,950 | Coach Men's \$450 Where to buy it? Go to G0.com/go/fashiondirectories



Be a Roughneck A knit tie's texture means it won't get lost.

(1) Knot Your Average All-Black Look

Wanna wear black to work? You have to nail the dress code while still making the Ramones proud. A black shirt, tie, and V-neck sweater will stave off the boss's sideeye so you can pull on a roughed-up leather moto jacket (after you clock out).

Sweater, \$1,400, shirt, \$790, and tie, \$280, by Prada. Jeans, \$395, by Ralph Lauren Black Label. Jacket, \$798, by Diesel. Sneakers, \$80, by Vault by Vans. Belt by Salvatore Ferragamo. Watch by Montblanc. Where to buy it? Go to GQ.com/go /fashiondirectories



M

Your Next Move





No two pieces of black clothing are the same shade, but that's okay so long as you're mixing fabrics and textures. Pile on a variety.



Coat, \$4,990, sweater, \$990, T-shirt, \$390, jeans, \$680, and sneakers, \$690, by Tom Ford. Bandanna by Hav-A-Hank. Watch by Montblanc. Belt by John Varvatos. Sunglasses by Salt Optics.





FIELD AGENTS FOR THE MEN IN BLACK



JOHNNY CASH

Wearing black doesn't require shot-a-dude-in-Reno levels of attitude, but it helps.

JUSTIN THEROUX



You can bite his moto style without actually riding one. (You're welcome, Mom!)

A\$AP ROCKY

So Formal



Rocky nails it when he trades the logo tees for allblack everything.



You can go dropcrotch urban ninja when you can dropstep into a nasty dunk.

BATMAN

Go to GO.com/go

/fashiondirectories

Suit's for function; cape's just a blatant bid to get on a street-style Tumblr.



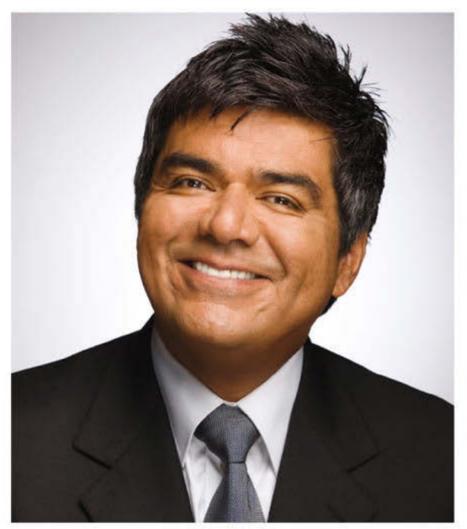
Salvatore Fevragamo



Salvatore Ferragamo

THE GENTLEMEN'S FUND

GO CELEBRATES EXTRAORDINARY MEN WHO ARE IMPROVING THE WORLD AROUND THEM.









2014 HONOREE GEORGE LOPEZ

When most people think of George Lopez, they think of the hilarious comic delivering sidesplitting laughs. Yet behind those laughs is a man who is seriously dedicated to helping those in need. Through his organization, The Lopez Foundation, he has worked to create positive change for disadvantaged youth and adults through education.

Additionally, the comedian spearheaded fund-raising efforts for Haiti, El Salvador, and Guatemala when those countries needed it most. Plus, after his own kidney transplant, Lopez made kidney health and donation awareness one of his top priorities.

The Lopez Foundation is an extension of Lopez's desire to go beyond simply entertaining us and to make the world around him a better place. The organization has already left an indelible mark on so many people around the world and thanks to its dedication and hard work, there is no doubt the impact of The Lopez Foundation will continue long into the future.

Get involved at

THELOPEZFOUNDATION.ORG





Grooming

16 11

How to Shave ace

We've had it backward this whole time: It's not about getting rid of the hair-it's about taking care of the skin underneath. So we've devised a no-b.s., whocares-how-many-blades routine that'll keep your baby-smooth face feeling as good as it looks

Repeat: Shaving Is Skin Care

· Don't think of this as the act of slicing off facial hair-stubble is dead and feels nothing. much like your friend who works in brand management. No. the right mentality for shaving is: How do I ensure that my smooth, soft skin remains smooth and soft? Once



you've accepted this as your guiding principle, your mission becomes clearer.

١

Slow Down, Samurai



· Yes, mornings are a groggy hustle to get out the door, but try not to grab

a razor the moment vou wake un. Your face is puffy when you roll out of bed, yielding a trickier shaving surface than when it's firmer. Wait at least ten minutes. Make coffee, watch SportsCenter, check your exgirlfriend's Instagram for the seventh timeit's your call.

3 Shaving Starts with a Shvitz

· Dermatologists suggest shaving in the shower, where the steam helps clear your pores and allows for a cleaner, closer cut. And sure, that works for some guys. If you're not a fan, you can shave right after, or use a hot moist towel to get the same effect.

Believe in Peak Oil

 Whether or not you shower (we're not udging), try one of those newfangled pre shave oils you might have heard about. (We like the all-natural avocado-oil-infused ones from Brooklyn Grooming, \$29.) It'll soften your stubble and create a smoother landscape for your razor. "Under a microscope, the skin looks like a mountain range, with peaks and valleys," says dermatologist Terrence Keaney. "A preshave oil fills those valleys in.

5 **Choose Your Weapon**

• In 2015, the best measure of American progress just might be razor-blade tech.



THE NO-HASSLE WONDER

· For the traveler who needs the same blade in every city. the Gillette Fusion ProGlide is top of its class. Or for the guy who'd sooner shave with a rusty butter knife than drive to the store for a blade refill, start-ups like Harry's and Dollar Shave Club will send



THE LAWN-MOWER MAN

• Electric shavers have always been easy to use but never good at their iob. Philips Norelco's 9000 series is basically the Bentley of the category, with slower speeds for sensitive skin and the ability to handle wet shaves (a.k.a. all the fancy face goops

6 Try a More Loving Lather



· Even after the shower and the shave oil, you still need to lather up your mug, but steer clear of Dad's trusty foam. It can dry out your skin, while a cream like Dove Men+Care (\$6) will keep everything hydrated.

Master the Angle of Attack

 Hold the razor flush against your face, but no need to apply extra pressure-modern blades are so sharp that a feathery touch will do.

11



Study the Map of Your Face

 Note the various directions that your beard hairs growif you're unsure, let your stubble go for a couple of days to find out. Now shave with the grain, once. (Lather up again if you need a second pass.) Cheeks first, then neck, then lips,



using your fingers to keep your skin taut.

9 **Never Go 'Home Alone'**

· Alcohol is for drinking, not for your aftershave.



Splash a little cold water to help rehydrate your skin, then rub in a light moisturizer. (Those prone to razor bumps can add Jack Black Bump Fix at night.) Look at that: beard gone, skin still there. healthier than ever. -SAM SCHUBE













DON'T CRACK UNDER PRESSURE



AQUARACER CALIBRE 5

Cristiano Ronaldo's unparalleled talent and record-breaking ability have made him a legendary athlete. Like TAG Heuer, his resilience and determination inspire him to overcome challenges and never crack under pressure.

Available at Bloomingdale's





Rebel Style 2 of 2



Make the Tux Crowd Green with Envy

• To Elkann, black tie is a state of mind, not a mandate. "When I look at the Oscars," he says, "I always see the actors dressed all alike—and very few of them are, how you say, really elegant." There's a vast middle ground between looking

like every other guy and stepping out in the male equivalent of Björk's swan dress. So yeah, you could copy Elkann's look with a jade green tux, flouncy lapels, and a big fat bow tie, but just one sartorial juke will do if you're shy.

Because ankle straps aren't peacocky enough, Elkann's Gucci shoes can also be monogrammed.









Become an Iconoclast (by Stealing from Your Icons)

• On the rare day that Elkann leaves the house unsuited, he'll channel one of his style idols, like midcentury French yachtsman Éric Tabarly, the most laissez-faire

man to ever set sail. In homage, Elkann wears Mediterranean classics with his own spin, like undone shoulder buttons on a nautical sweater and—his favorite power move—a jacket

worn as a cape. "It has an energy and a flair," Elkann says. "It's a very elegant outfit which you can wear on your boat." Be it a Sardinian yacht or the Staten Island Ferry.

Women don't want to have an unsexy man. Women want their man to look as sexy and elegant and refined as they do."

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REPORT

ADVERTISING | EVENTS | PROMOTIONS











$\begin{array}{c} GQ \times \text{LACOSTE Sport} \\ \text{Pop-Up} \end{array}$

This past October, GQ and LACOSTE opened a pop-up shop in NYC's Meatpacking District, bringing to life all that's new, now, and next in the world of sport and style. The pop-up featured innovative fashion, active gear, tools, and trends for the ultimate urban-sport lifestyle, including GQ-styled looks from the LACOSTE Fall/ Winter 2014 collections (LACOSTE City Golf, LACOSTE Mountain Golf, and LACOSTE Sport), all shoppable via LACOSTE's newly launched digital flagship store, LACOSTE.com. In addition to shopping, guests enjoyed daily programming in the form of fitness classes, golf-swing clinics, happy hours, and interactive sport experiences.



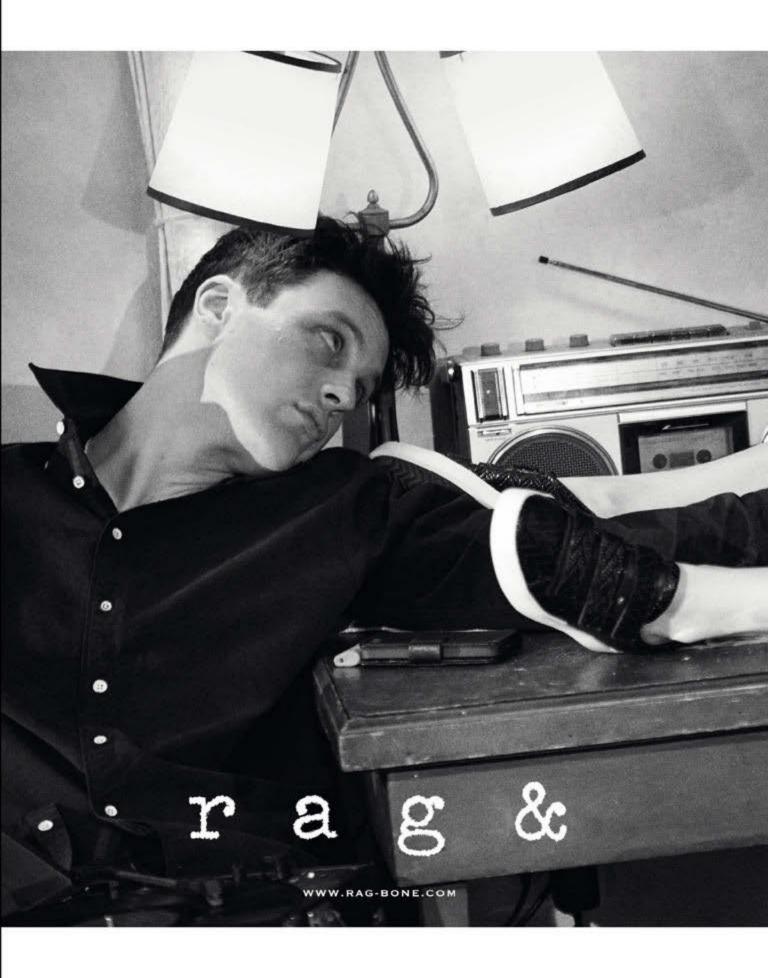


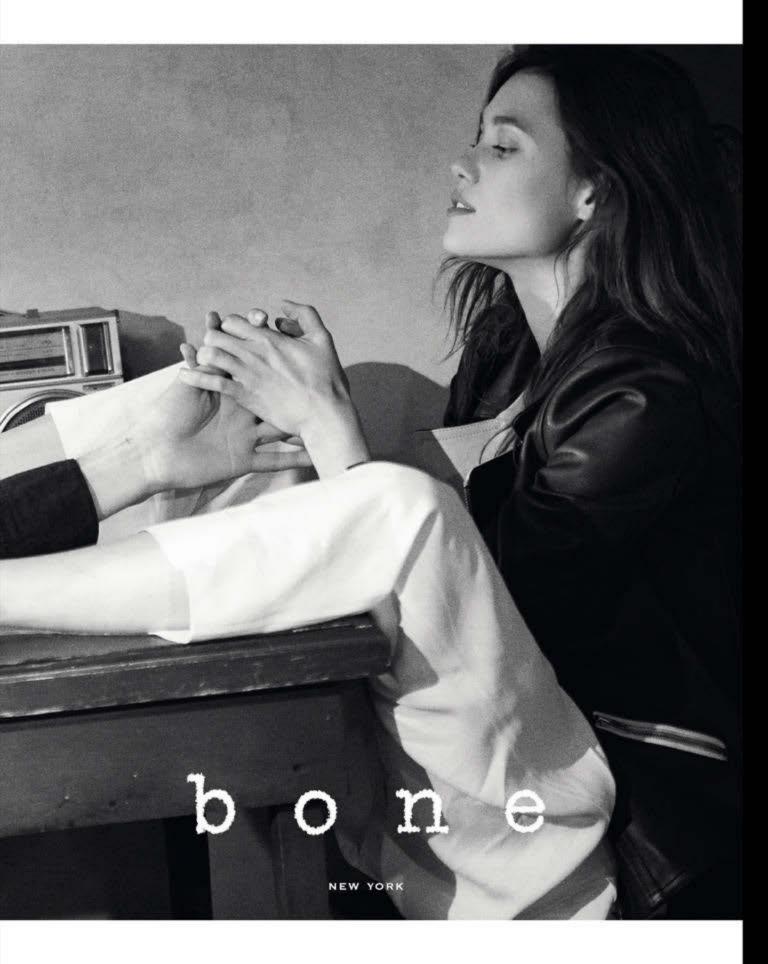












M The Style Guy

Glenn O'Brien

Solves Your Sartorial **Conundrums**





3000, A.

Ferry, B.



Cocker, J.

Curls Gone Wild

My hair looks best about twenty-four hours after I've washed it. So every other day-the day I use shampoo-I'm walking around with frizzy, out-ofcontrol hair. There's got to be a better way to live. Right? » I'm guessing you're using either the wrong conditioner or none at all. There are many grooming products that make hair behave without any adverse effects. Finding the right ones might require experimenting. It depends on what you're trying to achieve. Sleekness? Attitude? Unless vou're buzz-cut. product will probably help.

Smelling Like a Rose

All my cleansing and grooming products have different scents. Should I choose a personal theme scent and buy similar-smelling products? I try for absolute minimalism in product redolence. I think hair, complexion, shaving, and deodorant products should be about their performance, not their smell. If you must have fragrance in your products, go with what's simple, like Geo. F. Trumper's shaving creams in lime, almond, coconut, rose, or violet. Or Weleda's deodorant in sage,

citrus, or wild rose. I use Weleda sage deodorant, Dr. Bronner's almond castile soan. and Santa Maria Novella's melograno (pomegranate) acqua di colonia. I figure if I'm a medley of aromas, at least I smell good enough to eat.

Hangover

What's the best way to deal with a too-long belt? Do you tuck the excess belt material over itself? Just take the scissors to it? » Take it to your shoe-repair guy. He'll

The Style Guy welcomes your questions. E-mail him at styleguy@gq.com.

cut and re-stitch.

Costs almost nothing.

> I take it you've hung with some of history's most stylish rock stars, and I'm inclined to trust your opinion here: Who's the most stylish musician still performing out there? Charlie Watts is the best rock star at looking elegantly uncostumed-perfectly timed drums, timeless taste. André 3000 is a master of pushing the envelope of dashing high style. Bryan Ferry still looks flawless. David Bowie has had peaks of fantastic chic as well as moments of inspired abandon that transcend any human concept of embarrassment. Iggy never had a bad moment, except what the Shangri-Las described as "good bad, but he's not evil." For Dada-esque funkiness, the George Clinton Day-Glo-braids look remains historic. For fly urbanity, you have to hand it to Pharrell and Theophilus London, Jarvis Cocker has the best-used suits, and Brian Jones would have approved of his accessorization sense. Ornette Coleman is 85. He's still playing, still avant-garde. Still wearing the Klein Blue sharkskin suits and looking hipper than any cat.









What She Said

"Yes, Honey, That <u>Does Make Your Ass</u> Look Fa...bulous"

You hear the freighted fashion question from your better half and time freezes as you consider, for a millisecond, being brutally candid—but you stop, for fear of losing your eyeballs. Mary H.K. Choi knows how you can speak your mind, so long as you speak the right language

We all know the old trope:
Girlfriend in "going-out" clothes stands
between guy and TV during a crucial
match of sportsball. "Honey," she coos,
"does this make me look fat?" Boyfriend
horks out, "No way, babe. You look
smokin'," adding intense eye contact to
close out the platitude. Girlfriend is
reassured, fluffs out her clip-in hair, then
magically turns into a national carinsurance commercial, because the old
trope is sitcom horseshit.

Chances are you have an opinion on your significant other's appearance, and hopefully you're not a dismissive goon when it comes to fashion. But Lord knows being up-front with your lady can feel fraught with danger. So how can we incite an honest dialogue through which we can all look more awesome?

As a general tenet—I'd say nine times out of ten—only offer advice when explicitly asked. Women couldn't care less about male opinions on certain trends, no matter how fugly you find them. See: metallics, mom jeans, clogs, and neon-colored faux fur. We know you'll never understand, and that's cool. It's just like when y'all waltz home in a Stetson hat or suddenly get big into man jewelry—we don't die laughing, no matter how tempting. Uncharted sartorial territory



is brave work, so don't harsh your girl's mellow for sport. It's poor form.

If you *are* asked, learn to read between the lines. A perfunctory "How do I look?"—hair done, big grin, and *ta-da* hands—just requires you to say "Fantastic" and then enjoy some sex later. But a variation of "Does this look weird?"—complete with clothes everywhere and a genuinely baffled face—requires much more consideration on your part. This is where things get thorny.

If the outfit is a 360-degree shitshow, don't belabor her with a checklist of failures. Just say this: "The proportion doesn't seem right." And then stop. Furrow your brow. Let her pick out what she thinks is wrong, and agree. If she asks you what you think is wrong, know that this is a trap, furrow more, and pick whatever article of clothing takes up the most space. It will unspool the entire outfit and force her to start over. She will be light-to-medium mad at you, but you will have been right.

If there's a lone offending item, don't call it out by name—you want to smoothly suggest a better replacement. Be all "You look great, but you'd look crazy sexy in those suede booties you have." Be exacting in your language. Say "booties" if you know what they are. But—and this is important—if you've worn the same wide-leg cargo pants since college, just say, "Oh, man, I'd wear corduroy to a wedding if you'd let me!" and run away. You are out of your element.

On the flip side, if you're the stylish one, tread carefully. Don't mansplain. And don't deploy brand names with the zeal of Tim Gunn ethering some sad gal in the makeover scene of a competition reality show. There's something chilling in "Hmm...switch out the Vince Blair slip-ons for the Acne Pistol boots." It's label-whore-ish in a way that makes future sex nearly impossible. We'll see a spray-tanned Ken-doll bump where your dick once was, and it won't be our fault. And always remember that our asking for help isn't some hardwired daddy issue where we can't possibly brave the world without a dude's co-sign. We just need a spotter to nail the landing.

But what if your beloved possesses an article of clothing or an accessory so egregious that it consistently torments you? That hateful fashion-forward monstrosity that you're pretty sure is made of dead-people hair? Steel yourself and make the case to throw it out. Even if your opinion is unsolicited. Bite the bullet and refuse to be a party to that shit. Be polite but firm. You get to do this once, maybe twice. Ever. And know that you, too, will suffer a loss in the fracas. We don't care that your too-small purple leather motorcycle jacket is Japan-issue only. That's how teamwork goes, and we both have a reputation to uphold.

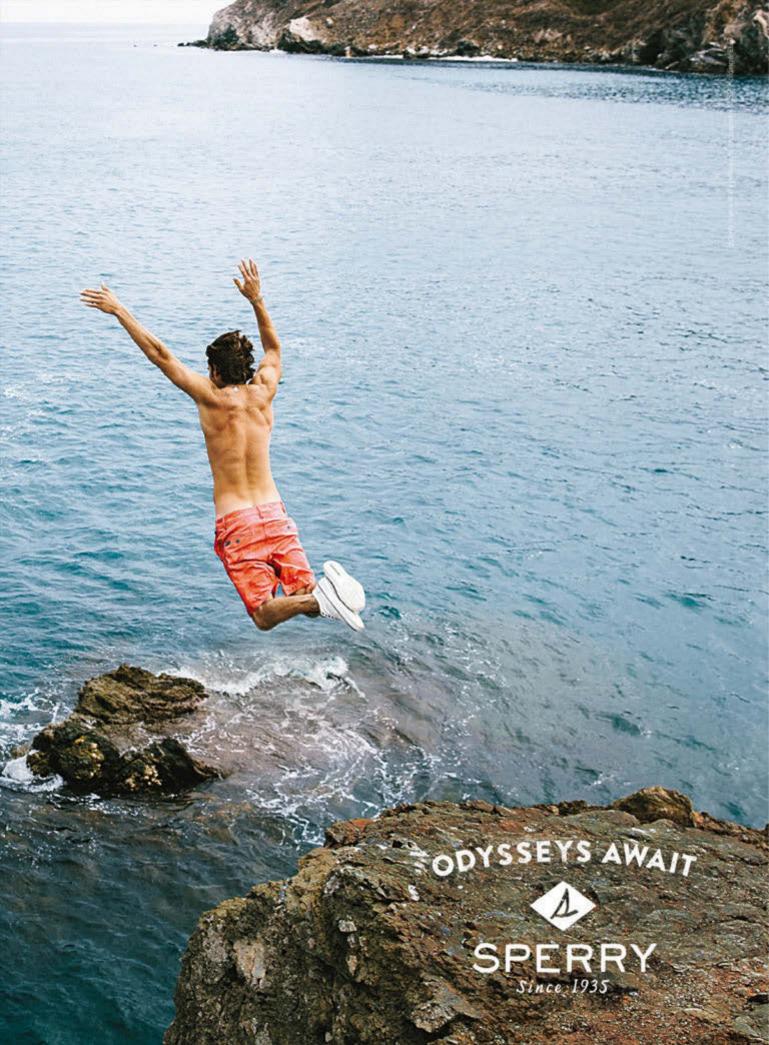


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Anything good starts with a plunge. Go feet first in the original boat shoe.

Invented by a seafaring adventurer. Worn by intrepid souls the world over. sperry.com







Despite what every orthodontist's personal parking spot would suggest, there are other ways to drop six figures on a sports car besides buying the ubiquitous Porsche 911. Perhaps you're looking for something more unexpected and lively, something with more...teeth than the iconic Germanic sports car? Perhaps you'd like to consider another German sports car? Specifically, the Mercedes-AMG GT S.

Slide inside—ass first, then swivel the



legs—and you're
18 again, with a
speed-addled grin
slapped on your
face even while you're
still parked in the
driveway. Press the
start button on
the console, nudge
the car into drive,
and that grin
becomes a smirk.

The sound and fury of the GTS makes you wonder if someone at Mercedes timetraveled back to 1970s Detroit, when muscle cars ruled the landscape. This car is loud and rude, the brutish exhaust rumble of 503 turbocharged horses washing over the poor saps you passwhich is everyone like the aftershock of an earthquake.

But listen, this isn't just a car with a nice personality. You have eyes, right? Look at this thing. It's deviously sexy, sleek and wide, and endlessly curvaceous, with a hood that stretches from the steering wheel off into the sunset. Credit

Bring On the Midlife Crisis!

The joke goes that you hit middle age and decide to recapture your youth with a sports car. Then you get one look at the Mercedes-AMG GT S and no matter how old you are, you think: I'd gladly take on some existential dread to drive that thing

the car's vaunted DNA. The GT S is the younger (and more affordable) brother of Benz's recently discontinued gullwinged SLS AMG, itself a descendant of the timeless,

extremely rare, also gullwinged Mercedes-Benz 300SL from the 1950s. Neither of those vehicles, though, boasts such a beautiful rear view. Slather the GT S's back end in baby oil, set a champagne glass on top, and it would break the Internet all over again.

All of which is to say, this car is too much oomph for a man who





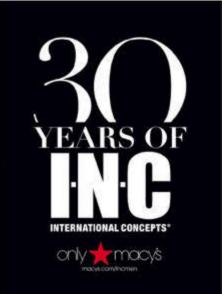
hangs diplomas in his office. Yes, there are competitors beyond the 911 worth considering. Nissan's GT-R is brutally fast but kind of robotic; Audi's R8 is exotic, sure, but subdued. They're all superego, whereas the Mercedes is a rolling hunk of raw, pulsing id.

Let everyone around you say that you're having a midlife crisis (or a quarter-life crisis), or that you're some over-moneyed attention whore. They might not be wrong, but they definitely won't be grinning so big.—HENRY TAYNE

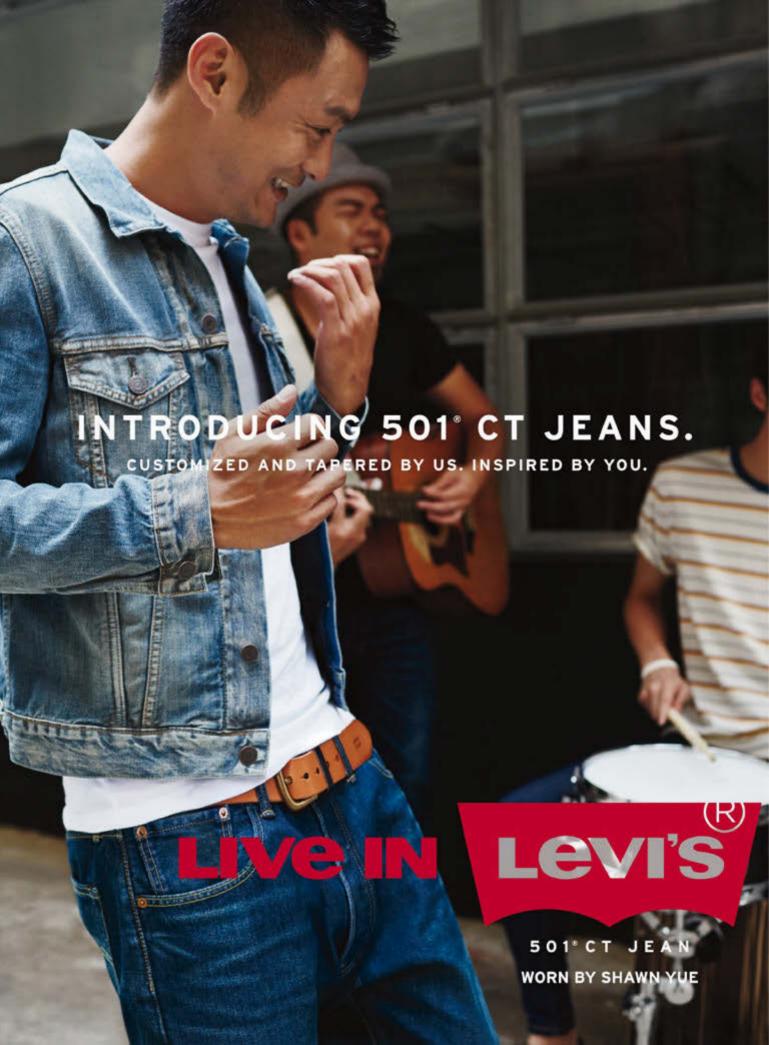
- The twin-turbo V-8 is hand-built and signed by the guy who made it.
- A gaping grille and intakes keep the engine and brakes *chiiilllll*.
- Tap a button inside and the exhaust goes from loud to louder.

Buttons and buttons of Germanic tech wizardry look so much sexier in a sea of brothel-red leather.

HEIDI KLUM and GABRIEL AUBRY celebrate 30 years of INC style







M

David Chang's Kitchen





Are You Ready for the Foodie Court?

There's a Global Food-Court Revolution afoot, and it's about to hit our shores, shopping malls, airports, subway stations, and corporate mega-structures. Chef Chang previews the next phase in the ongoing delicious-ization of everywhere

l can never get behind food trends, so now I'd like to get in front of one: the re-invention of the food court.

I've always loved food courts, all of them, from the crappiest shoppingmall version to the king of all courts, at Changi Airport in Singapore. Some of my great food memories from childhood happened

at Tysons Corner Center in Virginia, where I spent hours trapped in wonderfully painful indecision: Do I get the chicken sandwich at Chick-fil-a? The fries with special sauce at Jerry's? The chow mein platter at Panda Express? Or maybe I should indulge my taste for real Italian food at Sbarro? I swear I wouldn't have

developed the palate I have today if it weren't for the much maligned American food court. Talk shit about Cinnabon all you want, but the truth is, it's fucking delicious. Now the food court is about to get even tastier—and a whole lot healthier and higher—end than a sugar bomb the size of a pizza.

That concept might sound weird

to Americans, but elsewhere in the world, fancy food halls have long been culinary meccas. Mostly in Europe: Fauchon in Paris. Dallmayr in Munich, and the holiest of delicious temples, Peck in Milan. (Mario Carbone of Parm and Carbone introduced me to it, and seriously, it's the best place ever created.) In 2010, New York got its first taste of this when Mario Batali opened a U.S. branch of Eataly, the Italian Thunderdome. Five vears later there are Eatalys all over the planet, and now everyone wants to open a single-cuisine department store/ food court. (The one

I really want to see is a Singaporean hawker-stand concept. I need to get my chile crab and nasi lemak on.)

I'm not just talking about malls. This is happening in all kinds of virgin terrain that defies conventional logic about culinary real estate. Imagine, for example, how much less depressing hospitals would be if they served great food in the cafeteria (a personal dream of mine). Or consider how the Japanese have made effective use of crappy locations and turned them into gastronomic gold mines. Whenever friends ask me where to eat in Tokyo, I reel off the usual list of ramen-yas and

top sushi houses, but then I add a caveat: The best eating in Japan is in subway stations, basements, and department stores. They always think I'm being a dick and sending them on a fool's errand. Silly Americans don't believe that some of the finest eating in the world takes place in the concrete jungle underneath Tokyo, where there's a labyrinth of excellent and wellknown restaurants, bakeries, sweetshops, tea sellers, and grocers. The quality and sheer variety is staggering.

I'm starting to see versions of this in more and more of our big cities, from the thirty-plus-vendor **Grand Central Market** in downtown L.A. to **Gotham West Market** in New York City, with its amazingly diverse spread of tacos, ramen, and everything in between. Another prime N.Y.C. example is Hudson Eats at Brookfield Place, the bustling new food court in Lower Manhattan near my editor's office, where he worked on this column while eating an insanely good grilled cheese with butternut squash and sage brown butter from Little Muenster.

See? The newwave food court is everywhere, even in the making of this page. I'm always saying that we've taken the traditional restaurant as far as it can go. The gastronomic future is everywhere else, starting just up the escalators from the Hot Topic, right across from the J.Crew.





The data you don't use this month rolls over to next month.

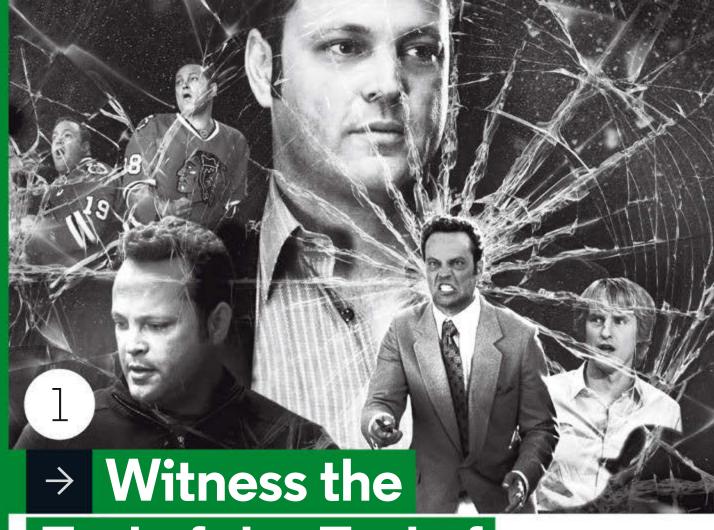
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nchList



End of the End of

Vince Vaughn

THE VAUGHNAISSANCE cometh, and it cometh soon. Now that Vince Vaughn has been handpicked to be one of capital-W Writer Nic Pizzolatto's gibberish puppets in True Detective, shouldn't we pause to examine where he's coming back from? Every Vaughn comedy since Wedding Crashers was a hit eight centuries ago has featured Vaughn as an aging superbro who is baffled by perfectly normal shit. In Delivery Man, he was baffled by children. In The Internship, he was baffled by

computers. In The Dilemma, he was baffled by fuel-efficient transportation. (His line about electric cars being "gay" in that trailer led to a whole shitstorm that would, obviously, baffle any Vaughn character.)

This also goes for his newest comedy, Unfinished Business, in which he's confronted by a small reduction in salary (dude!) handed down to him by a lady boss (DUDE, WHAT THE FUCK), so he has to start his own company and go to a meeting in Germany (DUDE, PEOPLE TALK FUNNY HERE AND DRINK BEER OUT OF

WEIRD VESSELS), where he must square off against the same blonde harpy. I assume his next movie will just feature him cursing at an LG washing machine for two hours.

This has all been a shame, because despite his recent output, I still like Vaughn, and it would be fascinating to watch him play a genuinely bad person—someone as nakedly corrupt as a doofy Vaughn character would like to be. He's in the exact right spot to subvert his own career rut, before getting big a second time and then fucking it all up again. So keep that in mind this summer as Vaughn ruminates about the duality of the universe while fucking some girl from behind. It'll be heartwarming, as only a premeditated Hollywood renaissance can be.—DREW MAGARY





→ Being the last man on Earth doesn't preclude there being a last woman. And lucky for us/ all of humanity, that woman is **Kristen** Schaal. In Fox's new post-Ebola-esque apocalypse comedy, The Last Man on Earth, she co-stars with Will Forte's eyes peering out of some woolly-mammothstyle facial hair (the titular desperately seeking man). Here, the candy-voiced Daily Show and 30 Rock comedian offers some endof-the-world real talk. -LAUREN BANS

How was it costarring with Will Forte's giant beard?

It was good! He's so handsome at any stage of facial hair. I mean, the beard pulled focus from me, but what are you gonna do? If I could grow a beard. I would. I'm working on it now. I've got two or three whiskers that are on their way.

Every time I turn on the TV, you're there. What shows are you not currently in?

I can tell you for sure that I am not in Game of Thrones. Which is heartbreaking. But I'm gunning for it. I'll play anyone. I'll play a dragon.

If you woke up as the last person on Earth, what would you do?

First I would survive a complete mental breakdown. I don't know how long that would take. Then I'd wear all the best designer clothes. But sooner or later I'd realize, "Well, who am I wearing these for?!" So at that point, I'd probably switch to the most comfortable clothes. Then I'd learn how to fly and I'd Amelia Earhart it—sans the disappearance—and go visit the Pyramids and the Great Wall. But eventually it would make me sad! So I might just end up barricading myself in nature, because nature wouldn't remind me that I was alone as much. I mean, it wouldn't be as in-my-face.

Who's your real-life pick for last man on Earth?

That's tough, but I would have to say my husband.

Not, say, Barack Obama?

I know him a little better than Barack Obama, and I can say for the record he'd be the best guy.

Post-apocalyptic beauty tips?

Take your time getting things right. You really have all day!

I, CLICHÉ Build Your Own Lovable Movie-Robot



→ Chappie, from District 9's Neill Blomkamp, is about a sentient heap of bionic junk parts. But besides Hugh Jackman, there's the titular robot—and he's as boilerplate as bots come. He's got a helmet! And kindly eye-lights! And loves blocks! Let's diagram Chappie's hackneyed origins.—STEVE KNOPPER



Screwdriver (1) Secret lab (1)

Eyes: WALL•E. ooking for love. Libido: Data from Star Trek. Deadpan (digital) timing. Body: Fembot from Austin Powers. Smoking boobs of death

Arms: C-3PO from Star Wars. Jabby elbows.

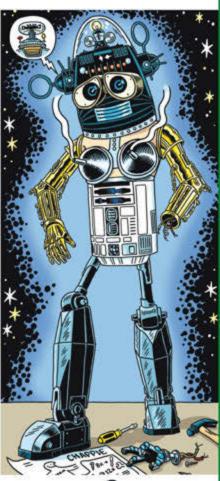
Skeleton: Terminator. Microprocessor controlled hyperalloy chassis!

Torso: R2-D2 from Star Wars. Shows 3-D home movies! Legs: The Iron Giant. No need for calf implants.

Voice: Robot from Lost in Space Stern but kinda soothing.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Inhabit dystopian universe.
- 2. Hire scientist. 3. Insert four metal pegs (A) into slots (B); rotate pegs clockwise until they click
- 4. Become sidekick
- **5.** Run.



WARD SUTTON

4-00

OH YEAH, THAT GUY!

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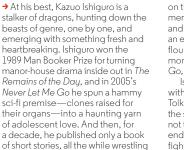
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MEDIEVAL TIMES

Slayeth This Literary Dragon Saga



Now, finally, comes The Buried Giant, his seventh novel, a postmodern Arthurian adventure complete with—yes—an actual dragon. The story, which follows several characters on overlapping medieval English quests, hinges

a dragon long unseen.

on the connection between memory and vengeance, forgetting and forgiveness. And the result is an engrossing battle, with technical flourishes that cut to the bonemore propulsive than Never Let Me Go, though not as fully realized.

Ishiquro has said he struggled with the dialogue, and a Tolkienesque stiffness still infects the spoken language (though not the evocative narration). The ending, which pivots from dragonfighting to a final confrontation between the central couple and their past, turns a cutesy twist into a devastating emotional coda. But Ishiguro's victory over medieval melodrama isn't decisive. The dragon is bloodied but still stalks the earth. Let's call it a draw. -BORIS KACHKA



RULE OF FIVE

→ Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension, the fifth P.A. movie (after one spin-off), makes some spooky shit out of a clueless family moving into a new house. That's right—this previously terrifying found footage" franchise is now about haunted houses! Where will it fall in the all-time order of movie fifths?—STEVE KNOPPER

HARRY POTTER AND THE #1.

4.578.791. SEED OF CHUCKY

4.578.792. POLICE ACADEMY : ASSIGNMENT MIAMI BEACH

GQINTELLIGENCE THEPUNCHLIST

03-04

RETROSPECTACLE

Experience Four Walls of Björk...and Sinatra

→ This month, two shows turn the careers of Björk (at N.Y.C.'s MoMA) and Frank Sinatra (at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts) into museum fodder.—SAM SCHUBE











Who are thev?

Greatest crooner of the twentieth century;

What's the log line?

cold-haver. The show "tells the story of a master singer,

Ithought they just

sana.

Pssh. Look for Frank's own art supplies—and original paintings!

performer, recording

artist, and actor."

What'll end up in Planet Hollywood? A pair of chaps from Frank's turn in, uh, Dirty Dingus Magee, which is a movie.

BJÖRK

Icelandic musician: possible figment of our collective imagination.

"[A] narrative, both biographical and imaginatively fictitious, by Björk and the acclaimed lcelandic writer Sjón."

See Biophilia (2011), "a hybrid software application and music album." It's the MoMA collection's first app.

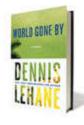
The "woolen leotard" from Björk's Volta album art. Just like your Martian granny used to knit.

06-06 GREAT READS Bury Your Nose in Two Violent American **Epics**



THE HARDER THEY COME by T. C. Boyle

A maximalist scribe of gothic melodrama, Boyle takes you on a manhunt through Californian pot groves, grisly Caribbean cruises, and Orwellian animal shelters before landing in horribly familiar territory: a disillusioned, psychotic white guy with a gun. Still, plenty of sex, booze, and satire to lighten things up. -BENJY HANSEN-



WORLD GONE BY by Dennis Lehane

Lehane is our preeminent keeper of corrupted souls (see: Mystic River and his contributions to The Wire) and Mob guys with beautiful paramours. His newest book perfectly concludes the story of Joe Coughlin, shadowy consigliere with juice in the Cuban and American underworlds. Full of murder, and goes great with scotch.—B.H.-B.

ORDER OF THE PHOENIX... # 4,578,789. ROCKY V # 4.578.790. A NIGHTMARE ON FLM STREET 5: THE DREAM CHILD

REPORT

ADVERTISING | EVENTS | PROMOTIONS







OCTOBER 2014 | LOS ANGELES

Montblanc and GQ Celebrate the Extreme Collection Launch

Hollywood notables such as Tracee Ellis Ross and Jesse Williams gathered for an intimate dinner with Los Angeles' tech and entertainment elite to celebrate the launch of Montblanc Extreme Collection. The evening commenced with cocktails on Chateau Marmont's Penthouse 64 terrace, and

Marmont's Penthouse 64 terrace, and transitioned to dinner in the living room, with a tablescape complete with custom place mats constructed from Montblanc's Extreme leather.







NOVEMBER 2014 | NEW YORK CITY

Calvin Klein Underwear Event

Calvin Klein Underwear and GQ celebrated the opening of the Calvin Klein Underwear shop in Macy's Herald Square. More than 120 guests enjoyed style consultations from GQ Executive Stylist/Publishing, Brett Fahlgren, cocktails, and music by DJ Franco V.







SEPTEMBER 2014 | NEW YORK CITY

BMW and GQ Celebrate Big Fall Style

New York's most talented designers, some familiar celebrity faces, and the fashion crowd took over the roof of the Wythe Hotel in Brooklyn to celebrate Fashion Week and the launch of the BMW 4-Series. A fleet of white 4-Series vehicles lined the hotel streets as guests arrived. The evening ended with up-and-coming rapper Travis Scott surprising attendees with an intimate performance.

Watch Malin Akerman Get Buckets

L

• If you want to understand, on a follicular level, the difference between network TV and the streaming upstarts, look no further than Malin Akerman's hair. In Sin City Saints, Yahoo's next comedy cannonball into original fare, Akerman plays Dusty Halford—a fancy-degree-having faux NBA exec and the anointed savior of a new Vegas franchise. But when she first arrives on-screen, her slicked-back crop like Robin Wright's as redesigned by Lockheed Martin, you can hear the suits choking on their matcha. "I asked [Yahoo] about my hair at the table read—whether I should wear a wig or anything—and they were just like, 'Let's go for it,' Akerman, typically cast as the long-sexyhair-having type, says while laughing. "It would've been a much bigger discussion if this had been a network show." Before acting (you know her from Watchmen and HBO's The Comeback), Akerman fronted an alt-rock band called the Petalstones—and sometimes misses the road: "You can do anything you want. You can get tatted up, you can dye your hair blue. You're a fucking rock star!" -KEVIN LINCOLN

Who's this guy?!

Giannis Antetokounmpo is six feet eleven and still growing—and each of his hands is the size of this magazine. Really. See page 160 for more.



STYLIST; MICHAEL NASH. GROOMING: SUSSY CAMPOS, HAIR: CREIGHTON BOWMAN FOR BABYLISS, MAKEUP; JEANNIA ROBINETTE FOR LANCÔME. MANICURE: MILLIE MACHADO FOR DIOR VERNIS. ON MALIN, SHIRT: ISABEL MARANT. BRA, SHORTS, AND SOCKS: AMERICAN APPAREL. SHOES: ADIDAS

NEW FROM BUD LIGHT BOLP COCKTAIL TASTE FOR WHEREVER THE NIGHT TAKES YOU



→ The Reddest Carpet: I Survived the North Korean Film Festival



KIM JONG-IL LOVED THE MOVIES. After a hard day running the world's most oppressive regime, the jumpsuit-clad dictator would, according to local lore, repair to his private cinema deep inside a Pyongyang bunker, where he'd select his entertainment from a collection of 20,000 videos. The Dear Leader, who ruled North Korea from 1994 to 2011, was reputed to worship *Rambo*, and it requires little imagination to picture him chortling at the explosions, the macho dialogue, the buxom actresses, the sheer charisma of the vigilante.

Comrade Kim-whose official titles included Iron-Willed Brilliant Commander and Guiding Star of the Twenty-first Century-died in 2011, and yet he attends the movies still, in a manner of speaking. Here he is now, in a sprawling mural on the wall of the Ponghwa Art Theatre lobby, standing alongside

Remember when Pyongyang freaked out about that Seth Rogen movie, all those Sony e-mails were leaked, and hackers threatened to attack American theaters? Well, it turns out that North Koreans have always taken film seriously—like, kidnapyour-favorite-director seriously—and their signature cultural event is a full-on propaganda-packed cinemapalooza that's closed to nearly all foreigners. In this GQ exclusive, MITCH MOXLEY risks his freedom and his sanity to spend eight surreal days watching movies in the Hermit Kingdom



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· Welcome, comrades, to the Ponghwa Art Theatre.

his father, the Great Leader and Eternal President Kim Il-sung, surrounded by smiling soldiers and dancing women and cheering masses. Together they welcome guests and delegates to a very special event: the opening ceremony of the biennial Pyongyang International Film Festival.

I'm standing below the mural, staring gape-jawed at the Kims as attendees file into the auditorium. Swirling around me are military men in olive uniforms and half-moon hats, high-ranking government officials with jet-black hair, and hardworking citizens of the capital decked out in fine suits and traditional dresses that look like Christmas trees. There's also an oddball assortment of foreign delegates from countries as far-flung as Myanmar and Iran.

The communist government of Kim Jong-il's apple-cheeked son, Kim Jong-un, has allowed exactly eight tourists to attend the festival. I am one of them. We're a collection of curious film buffs who have paid a group called Koryo Tours about \$2,000, on top of airfare to and from Beijing, for the privilege of visiting the secretive Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

It's a strange time to be in the country: Just three days ago, a 25-year-old American named Matthew Miller was sentenced to six years of hard labor for tearing up his tourist visa upon arrival

because of a "wild ambition," he supposedly said, to see a North Korean prison. Meanwhile, two other Americans are languishing in the country's penal system for alleged Christian proselytizing. This is all while Seth Rogen and James Franco are preparing to promote *The Interview*, the Kim Jong-un assassination comedy that will ultimately provoke North Korean sympathizers to launch an epic cyberattack on Sony Pictures, nearly forcing the studio to abort the film's release—which shouldn't have been surprising, for this is a country that treats cinema as a matter of life and death.

"Let's go!" says Miss P, our petite headmistress of a guide, trying to usher us to our seats in the auditorium. We're lingering in the lobby. Miss P is wearing cateye glasses and a no-nonsense skirt and blouse, and making clear on our first full day in the country that she disapproves of lingering. "Let's go!"

Miss P leads us past two young women in flight-attendant outfits offering cups of a sugary carbonated apple drink, and past a bustling concession stand selling cans of coffee, bags of dried banana slices, and mystery-meat wieners. Meanwhile our other local guide, Mr. O, a thirtysomething man with square glasses, a dimpled smile, and frizzy hair that perpetually looks like

it's just been towel-dried, corrals a few members of the group who've wandered off to take photos. Miss P looks like she's about to burst a blood vessel. "Come on," she says. "The ceremony will begin."

The eight of us take our seats together in a row. I'm sitting beside Koryo's tour leader, Vicky, a sardonic Scottish expat who lives in Beijing and is on her tenth trip to the DPRK. On my right is Andrew, a friendly man with a peppery gray beard who is the number one Tupperware salesman in the United Kingdom. Farther down is Roman, a dreadlocked Polish DJ who's writing his master's thesis on North Korean cinema, and Hyae-shook, a Korean-Canadian housewife whose parents fled from the North before the war. In the aisle in front of us is the photo crew: Yuri, from Moscow, secretly shooting for this magazine, and Mark, a bon vivant from Los Angeles.

Koryo's representatives have told us we'll be safe as long as we don't do anything stupid. But I can't help wondering what happens if the North Koreans find out I'm a journalist. Does reporting on the film fest qualify as "something stupid"?

The festival's hosts—two women and a man—appear onstage to light cheering. They welcome guests in Korean and awkward English. The ceremony's vibe is Eurovision meets grade-school pageant.





· Kim Jong-il (right, next to a sculpture of his father, Kim Il-sung) towers literally and metaphorically over the North Korean movie scene.

Above the stage is a suspended plastic dove that looks like it's pooping out a rainbow-colored film reel. A sunrise graphic playing on a screen in the back appears to have been made on Windows 95. The hosts call to the stage the minister of culture, a squat, bullet-shaped man. "During the festival, you will be able to witness with your own eyes the reality of Korea," he says in the halting monotone of a career bureaucrat. "In which the beautiful dream and ideal of the people come into full bloom, as well as the confidence and optimism of the Korean people, who are making a dynamic struggle to build a thriving nation under the wise leadership of the dear respected Kim Jong-un."

After a few more speeches and songand-dance performances, the hosts announce the opening picture: Fast Girls, a low-budget 2012 British drama about female track-and-field hopefuls, whose rippling muscles and nubile buns get enough screen time to become characters unto themselves. The story centers on a sprinter recruited to the national relay squad. At first her rebellious streak makes her an awkward fit, but—in a common North Korean movie trope—she ultimately learns the value of teamwork and cooperation.

We sit back and take in the movie, oblivious and numb. That's the power of film,

of course, and a clue as to why the dictatorship would allow it. And the local film crews scattered throughout the auditorium, whose cameras are often pointed in our direction, provide a clue as to why the regime would allow *us*.

As the credits roll, the audience politely applauds. "And the crowd goes wild!" Vicky says drily. "That was pretty shite."

It almost doesn't matter. The world's most unlikely film festival is under way.

THE YANGGAKDO INTERNATIONAL

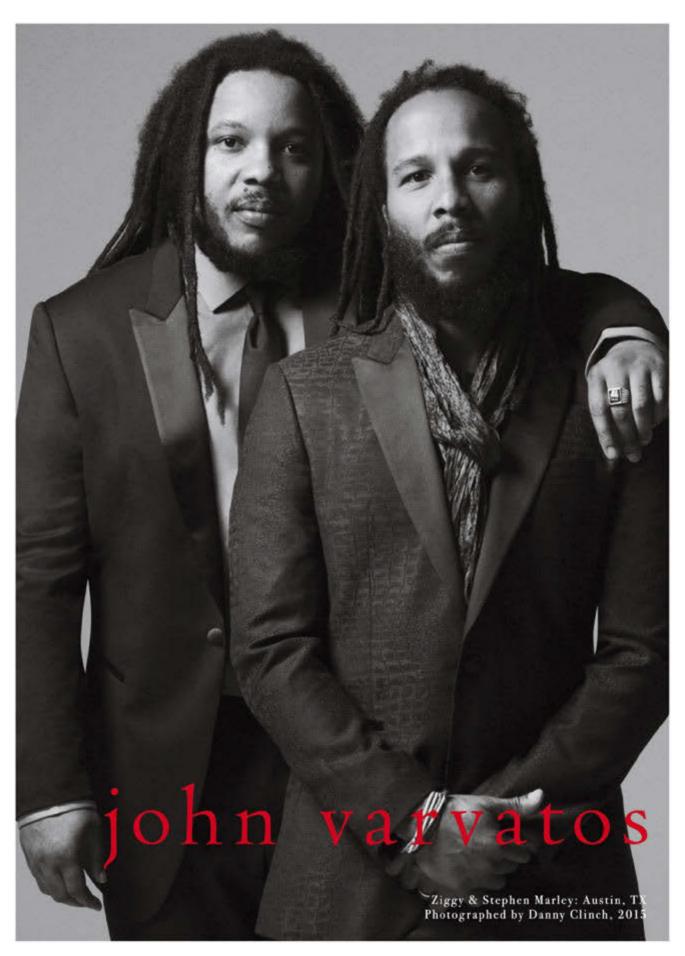
Hotel—a.k.a. Festival HQ and our home for the duration of the trip—looms like a spectral fortress in the middle of Pyongyang. It's situated on a small island halfway across the moat-like Taedong River, which conveniently prevents mischievous tourists from giving their guides the slip. The place is basically Alcatraz with a pool—and a bowling alley, brew pub, billiards room, Egyptian-themed casino, revolving rooftop restaurant, and a "full body" massage parlor in the basement.

Visitors often compare Pyongyang to a movie set. More specifically, it's like *The Truman Show*. It's as if every person, every object, has been placed there especially for you. There's something costumey about the way people dress, and something dialoguey about the way they talk. You can

also learn a lot by what's unseen: garbage, pets, glowing restaurant signs, shopping malls. Look closely and everything seems cheap and staged.

In this respect, the city makes a natural setting for a film festival—a celebration of the imagination. PIFF was launched in 1987 as the Pyongyang Film Festival of Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries. This was toward the end of North Korean cinema's golden age, a real thing that existed almost entirely due to the unbridled enthusiasm of Kim Jong-il, who served as minister of culture before grabbing North Korea's unsteady reins after his father's death.

The Dear Leader still casts a girthy shadow over North Korean cinema. He wrote not one but two treatises on film-On the Art of the Cinema (1973) and The Cinema and Directing (1987)-that continue to steer the country's movie industry. The books are filled with weirdly precise directives about how film can serve the country's juche (loosely, "selfreliant") ideology. A pretty standard example: "A writer who is to serve the people must naturally have a deep interest in their lives, and be quick to recognize the urgent problems which can be used to raise the level of their class consciousness and to advance society,



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and must strive to solve them in the interests of the revolution."

In the decades after the DPRK's founding in 1948, movies were used to reinforce and perpetuate the national myths: the fatherly wisdom of the leaders, the virtue of sacrifice to the nation, the importance of the collective over the individual. (Schoolchildren and workers attended mandatory film screenings as a means of ideological training even as the country struggled to feed its own people.) Though fewer in number than in the heyday of the 1970s and '80s, most films produced in recent years follow the same formula.

Kim is said to have dabbled behind the camera himself, supposedly producing such films as 1969's Sea of Blood, a blackand-white epic set during the Japanese occupation. In 1978 he allegedly ordered the kidnapping of the South Korean director Shin Sang-ok, who served four years in a prison camp—surviving, Shin later said, on "grass, rice, and salt"-before finally agreeing to make movies alongside the Dear Leader. By then Kim had grown despondent about the state of the North Korean film industry. Unbothered by more pressing issues facing his country, Kim sent filmmakers to East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union to learn the latest techniques, but North Korean movies still paled compared with those made overseas. "I have been struggling with this problem for five years," Kim told Shin in 1983. "We have to know that we are lagging behind and make efforts to raise a new generation of filmmakers."

Kim and Shin embarked on a mission to create a new type of North Korean movie, one that both entertained and indoctrinated. The duo made seven films together, the best-known of which is 1985's *Pulgasari*, a \$3 million monster movie often called North Korea's *Godzilla*. The director escaped in 1986 while on a film junket in Vienna, fleeing to the U.S. embassy. The film lives on, however, on YouTube.

PIFF now receives around 500 submissions from more than fifty countries. This year, twenty-nine movies are screening in three competitive categoriesfeatures, documentaries, and shorts and animation-with another sixty-three shown out of competition. (Still, the delegates I speak with during my stay view PIFF more as a novelty than as a serious stop on the festival circuit.) The festival's lineup is stocked with pictures that will never reach a theater in the United States: Myanmar's The Moon Lotus, for example, alongside India's Singh Saab the Great and an Egyptian documentary called I'm Tremendously Happy That I'm Going to Play Golf.

If nothing else, the festival allows some basic interaction between North Korea and the outside world. Dozens of delegates are here screening films from all over the globe, and that qualifies as cultural exchange, even if those movies aren't 12 Years a Slave. It's about baby steps. But there's a flip side: Hosting an international film fest is also a chance for the regime to say, Citizens, look at how open we are! Witness these many foreigners flocking here to show us their movies! "Of course, it's a big propaganda event," says Johannes Schönherr, author of North Korean Cinema: A History and a festival delegate in 2000. "And of course, foreigners who attend the event become extras in the big propaganda show."

THE MORNING AFTER the opening ceremony, after a breakfast of eggs and "rice gruel" from the hotel buffet, we're taken on a tour of the sprawling Pyongyang Film Studio, which is sometimes called North Korea's Hollywood. It's a peculiar moniker, considering no films are actually being shot here during our visit. The studio puts out just a handful of movies a year, a distant cry from the days when Kim Jong-il was an on-set fixture. It's now essentially a propaganda tool, like the movies it once pumped out, suggesting a booming industry that doesn't really exist.

Today the lot is crawling with school groups. We walk through empty sets made to look like ancient times and others resembling midcentury Europe and China. South Korea Street, as it's called, portrays the "puppet" state on the other side of the

DMZ as debauched and morally bankrupt. There's bar after fake bar, ads for Suntory Brandy, and a hand-painted poster for Marilyn Monroe's *The Seven Year Itch*.

In the afternoon, we're taken to Pyongyang International Cinema House, one of the festival's main screening locations, on the same lot as our hotel. Its vast interior is lit only by skylights and strung Christmas lights. Our group, along with a couple of dozen locals, is ushered into a onehundred-seat cinema that smells like an old couch for a screening of 1972's Flower Girl, one of North Korea's most treasured movies. It tells the story of a peasant girl forced to sell flowers to afford medicine for her ailing mother, who has toiled for years in the service of a cruel family that collaborates with Japanese imperialists. In the end, the common people rise up to rid the nation of "landlords and capitalists." North Korean legend has it that Kim Il-sung wrote the script.

In the audience is the film's star, Hong Young-hee. Just 17 years old when the movie was made, she's now middle-aged, with a gentle, motherly face and a perm—the Sally Field of the Hermit Kingdom. Before the screening, she reads a speech titled "Past, Present, and Future of *Juche* Film Art," dishing about Kim Jong-il's presence on set, where he offered wide-ranging advice on acting, costuming, and props. The Dear Leader "wisely led filmmakers to make ideologically and artistically excellent films," she reads into the microphone. Kim couldn't have said it better himself.

Unless treated as a historical artifact, *Flower Girl* is tough to watch. Lacking

Smells Like Cat Breath: Highlights from Pyongyang's Finest Concession Stands

Sugary Popcorn

At the screening room of Pyongyang's April 25 Film Studio is the country's first movie-theater popcorn machine. Except here the popcorn is coated with sugar, served room temperature and sans butter. Tastes like: Cracker Jack's weak-ass cousin Makes you craye; normal

Makes you crave: normal movie-theater popcorn

RATING







Imitation-Meat Corn

The concession stand at Pyongyang's lavish Taedongmun Cinema is stocked with all sorts of goodies, including a crunchy corn-chiplike snack with "imitation meat" flavoring. Yum! Tastes like: powdered kimchi and pork sprinkled onto a Frito Is surprisingly not: terrible

RATING





Dried-Shrimp "Fries"

Also at Taedongmun is this exotic nibble— a packet of tiny dried shrimp covered in red powder, with the texture of fingernail clippings.

Smells like: cat breath Tastes like: kimchi that has been regurgitated by a cat Demerits for: stinking up our whole damn bus.

— M. M.

RATING:









be very. like perry.

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• Nothing about North Korea ever feels guite real.

nuance of any form, it consists of three main components: weeping, crying, and sobbing. The acting is wooden, the pace painfully slow. I attempt to sleep several times, but the theater is too hot, the seats too uncomfortable. During the screening, North Korean TV cameras, there to capture festival footage, focus on us eight outsiders, blinding us with their lights.

Afterward, outside in the afternoon sun, Hong politely poses for photos with a few fans. When I ask through Miss P whether the actress still makes movies, Hong laughs quietly and says no, she's just an "old lady." Then she leaves, and that's that. This is celebrity in North Korea.

On the bus, I make the mistake of asking Mr. O if he thought the movie was boring. He answers gravely, "No." I immediately regret asking the question and tell him I found it interesting, though there was too much crying.

He nods. "A green nation cannot be happy."

"Green?"

"Greeeive."

"Grieving?"

"Yes. Cannot be happy."

WE WATCH MOVIES. Some are North Korean—The Other Side of the Mountain, A Traffic Controller on the Crossroads and others are foreign. We see Good Fellows, which is not a Scorsese remake but a gentle Iranian morality tale set in an elementary school. We also catch Bollywood superhero flick Krrish 3 in a 2,000-seat theater so oversold that people are seated in the aisles. The movie's dance sequences allow for gratuitous shots of the hero's oiled pecs and feathered mullet; in one musical interlude, Krrish dry-humps a female villain against a canyon wall. The audience loves it.

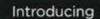
When we're not watching movies, we talk about them. Every night, Roman, the Polish DJ, views a North Korean movie on a laptop as research for his master's thesis, and he gives us plot rundowns the next day. I ask our guides about their favorite films. Mr. O is all about *Nation and Destiny*, the longest-running film series in North Korean history. Miss P says she doesn't have a favorite, she's seen too many. What about foreign movies? I ask. She leans in and whispers, "*Titanic*. It's very romantic."

Throughout the festival I take notes as discreetly as possible. Reporting is tricky in that I'm not technically allowed to report anything or talk to regular North Koreans about anything remotely substantial; in fact, before leaving Beijing I'd been made to sign a form that assured I wasn't a journalist. (The pretend job title on my visa application was "independent travel promoter.") Yuri is periodically forced to delete

photos from his camera of soldiers or anything Mr. O deems "dirty." At one point, Mr. O sees me scribbling in a notebook and asks, "Are you reporter?" He doesn't look scared or angry, more like perturbed. I mumble that I'm just writing down my thoughts, and he makes a face like he's smelled something foul. "Reporter!" he says, before climbing onto the bus. I stick to writing in my phone after that.

AFTER A FEW DAYS of moviegoing, Miss P and Mr. O take us to North Korea's holy place: the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun, where Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il lie in state. On the bus over, Miss P briefs us on the palace's many formalities: Empty your pockets of everything; don't cross your arms; don't hold your hands behind your back or in your pockets; bow on each side of the leaders' bodies; etc.

Once inside the Sun Palace, visitors are made to stand on a moving walkway and examine several decades' worth of framed pictures of the leaders. Most depict them delivering the family's patented field guidance—basically, pointing at stuff. Many have clearly been Photoshopped. Some are so absurd you're tempted to laugh, if it weren't for the risk of being scolded. In one, Kim Jong-il, dressed in a tan jumpsuit, is standing on a cliff overlooking an emerald sea, a big smile revealing



THE STARBUCKS FLAT WHITE

Two ristretto shots for a bolder espresso.

Joined by the velvety sweetness of steamed whole milk. United in a sip like no other.

SIMPLICITY IS
ITS OWN ARTISTRY.





• The Pyongyang skyline as seen from the top of the Juche Tower, a phallic local landmark.

cigarette-yellowed teeth, hips slightly askew in a pose inspired by a 1950s starlet.

The leaders are kept in separate rooms. They are both in glass boxes, covered in blankets and lit in faint red light. The rooms are cold. Well-dressed Koreans weep and dry their eyes with hankies. We stand in rows of four, walk slowly around the boxes, bow awkwardly on each side, and move on. Each crypt is followed by a room containing framed awards, medals, and honorary degrees, most of which come from leaders of long-gone Third World dictatorships: Pinochet, Sese Seko, Idi Amin.

We step outside into the palace's vast courtyard. It's drizzling and cool. "I like the rain. Washing off the crazy," Andrew the Tupperware Man says. "That was like some crazy interactive theater."

On the bus heading to the next mustsee monument, I keep thinking about Kim Jong-il's preserved corpse. That was weird. Kim Jong-il, he's the despot we grew up with, the ornery bad guy in *Team America: World Police.* Hollywood could not have created a more perfect dictator for the outside world to mock. The tinted glasses, the bouffant, the wee pointed shoes.

But seeing with my own eyes his shriveled, blanket-covered body, looking like a sleeping raisin in a room resembling a Shanghai cocktail lounge, I felt kind of sad. Not sad for the man, but sad about the whole thing. It's easy to laugh at North Korea, but it's a lot tougher to understand it—the people, the history, the ideology. It's impossible, really. I could watch a hundred North Korean movies, squirming with boredom every time, and still not get them. Because the movies speak to feelings—deep, complex feelings—that you and I will never know. And what became crystal clear as we walked through the Sun

Palace is that those emotions are not funny or ironic to North Koreans. They are real, and they hurt. We could see them all in Miss P's dampened eyes. If she was acting, she deserves an Oscar.

OUR GUIDES TELL US to look nice. Tuck in your shirt, that kind of thing. Tonight's the big night, when the prestigious Grand Prix gets awarded to the festival's top film. The closing ceremony is back at Ponghwa theater, and the scene feels much like the opening. This time, though, there are more cameras, and they are very much focused on our gang of eight as we enter the auditorium and find our seats. We wonder if we're going to be on North Korean TV.

Onstage is the same pooping dove and female host struggling with her English. There are speeches and performances, and I soon stop paying attention. I flip through a program and drift off thinking about how surreal and surprising the festival has been. One film from the Philippines featured a gay protagonist—this in a country where the government claims homosexuality doesn't exist within its borders. The Judi Dench vehicle *Philomena* was on the program, along with shorts from Canada and Australia, a gesture toward the West that runs contrary to our prevailing assumptions about the DPRK.

In fact, while our visit has largely reinforced some North Korean stereotypes, the country itself has been, in many ways, a surprise. Foreigners can purchase 3G SIM cards for their cell phones. NGOs work here, and Christian tour groups are allowed to pass through, as long as they don't try to convert anyone. (And those three incarcerated Americans were ultimately released after negotiations with Washington.) Though the government

perpetually denounces capitalist America, you can buy Coke imported from China. Pyongyang has a Viennese café and a pizza restaurant where a performer belts out "My Heart Will Go On." I saw a boy in a Steve Nash Phoenix Suns jersey and a girl in fresh New Balance sneakers. This place isn't as cut off from the world as the rest of us think.

This is a good thing, I muse to myself. Yes, this festival is a benevolent force, a much needed way of bringing the world to North Korea and vice versa. Through film we can understand each another. Movies can help make the world a better place....

And just then a thin Swedish delegate named Henrik Nydqvist takes the stage, and all those noble ideals dissolve like vaporizer mist. Fifteen minutes before the ceremony, Nydqvist's Korean minders had handed him sheets of paper and told him it was too late to deliver the speech he'd prepared on his own—a personal message, on behalf of all the foreign delegates, about the virtues of cultural exchange through film—which he'd been assured he could present. Instead, he must read this one:

"To your esteemed excellency, Kim Jong-un," Nydqvist begins, addressing the absent leader, his accented words echoing throughout the auditorium. "We express our heartfelt thanks to your excellency for the meticulous care you have shown to the success of the festival from the beginning to the end.... People admire, and will remember in their hearts, the undying exploits and greatness of your excellency, who pursues the policy of love for the people, true to the noble intention of the great generalissimos Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, the eternal suns of *Juche...*."

His speech done, Nydqvist exits the stage and we settle in for one last movie: the German film *My Beautiful Country*, a tale of forbidden love between a wounded Albanian soldier and a Serbian widow during Kosovo's civil war. The story adheres to another common North Korean movie theme—the pain of separation—and thus earns *My Beautiful Country* the Grand Prix.

As the theater darkens, I sit next to Mr. O and watch my final movie on the North Korean big screen. It seems like a pretty good film, though I wouldn't really know, since it's not subtitled.

The movie isn't meant for me, anyway. The entire festival, from beginning to end, is for the North Koreans in the theater: the soldiers, the party members, the people. The rest of us, we're just extras.

MITCH MOXLEY is the author of Apologies to My Censor: The High and Low Adventures of a Foreigner in China.



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Quitting is a good thing.

QUITTER: Is there another word in the English language with a worse reputation? It even sounds like a bummer. Quitonomatopoeia for some kind of involuntary jellied release. "Ugh, he just quit on you—you'll want a handkerchief for that."

We avert our eyes from the word and prefer to use it only when celebrating its absence, as if describing a negative X-ray. "That boy's got no quit in him!"no trace of that toxic malaise that clogs the arteries, demineralizes the

bones, and wilts the resolve. Why do we Americans equate quitting with surrender and failure? We've taken a neutral descriptor. meant to denote a cessation or exit, and stuffed it full of our Manifest Destiny.

Well, it's time to quit that shit out. We at GQ hereby reclaim the meaning of quit. To re-neutralize it? That's not enough. We're re-painting it, replacing its sullen beige hue with a golden gloss, and deploying it as an action verb. We're re-patriotizing it, returning the

mandate it enjoyed when this country kicked off. (Colonies to George III: "We quit!") Because quitting can and should be an affirmative act.

A righteous, well-timed quit-of a career, a spouse, a pastime—is a salutary thing. It's the enemy of passivity. It clears the mind and defibrillates the body. A good quit is a self-acquittal by which you seize the wheel of your own life and steer it where vou will. So do it. brother. Get off your ass and quit! — ANDREW CORSELLO

Be decisive.

The phrase "I'm thinking about..." should not be uttered. It makes you, the guitter, feel like a weenie. It makes the guittee question your resolve. You're about to do something that might hurt someone, and you know it. Don't pretend otherwise.





Stop lying to yourself. "WHEN YOU'RE thinking of doing something new, it's normal to have a kind of negative feeling and then a rationalization as to why you think it's a bad idea: 'Oh, I shouldn't change careers, because I'm too old' or 'It's going to be too hard.' The rationalization is just the bullshit

we put together to explain that feeling. So the first thing is: Don't believe your rationalizations."

-RYAN BABINEAUX, Often: How Losing Can



You've gotta know when to fold 'em. By Max Silvestri

PARTYING Too soon to quit: You black out and wake up with what looks like pizza in your bed. Time to quit: You black out and wake up with what looks like Pizzza in your bed.





Bandwagons are made for jumping off.

SPORTS DIEHARDS

think it's a crime against humanity to be a fair-weather fan. But since their last World Series win, in 1668, the Cubs have provided supporters like me with a string of futility so profound that it borders on existential. It's pitiful to be a grown man sobbing about an organization you're loyal to because it's situated in vaguely the same region as your birth hospital. So stop rooting for the bums. If you're worried about breaking family tradition, don't go cheer for a rivaljust don't cheer for anyone until your team gets above 500. Also, in this case and many others. it's okay to break family tradition. My grandfather loved the Cubs, but he also loved White Castle. My dad is so into Barry Manilow that he once bootlegged a concert. I'm my own man, is what I'm saving. And from now on, the Cubs and I are taking a break. It's not me, Chicago, it's vou. And we'll always have 1668.





Only you can make this decision.

THE HARDEST

part of quitting is knowing when you should, and even the experts may disagree on when it's time to flee. Here, Pea Streep, co-author of Quitting, debates common scenarios with Seth Godin, author of the bestseller The Dip: A Little Book That Teaches You When to Quit. BRYAN LUFKIN

You've been dating a girl for a year. It's going great, except for the sex—which is terrible and not improving.

Streep: How great can it be if the sex is terrible? You need to bail. Now.

Godin:

Conversation is an aphrodisiac. You don't have a quitting problem; you have a talking and a listening problem.

You're the number two in your department, and the number one is fired. They hire someone from the outside to be the number one.

Streep: If you're not updating your résumé at ťhis very moment, you're missing the message. Bottom line? Your turn isn't coming. Locate the nearest door and plan your exit.

Godin: Is being number one the point? Is this a game to be won? If that's your take, then you just heard from the judges, didn't you? But if your goal is simply to do work you're proud of with people you care about...

The host at Chili's quoted you a thirty-minute wait, but you've already been there for forty-five with no end in sight.

Streep: You were fine cooling your heels for thirty minutes, but an extra fifteen has you unhinged? Patience, my friend, is a virtue. And besides what's the host supposed to do? Chase people from their tables?

Godin: Wait. You went to Chili's?

2. Extra **Shoelaces**

"If I get another pair of Chuck Taylors, then I can use these purple ones to..." You had that idea in 2006. It's 2015.

3. Old phone chargers

A failure to

quit your

stuff is called

hoarding.

So throw these

things away today.

1. Headbands

You do not look like

LeBron. You look

like Will Ferrell in

Semi-Pro.

No. you're not going to magically wind up with a Razr flip phone again.

4. Disposable razors

It says "disposable" right on the package. Trust that.

5. Baileys Irish Cream

The ring of filmy dust around the neck of the bottle is an indication that it's not a fave.

6. Mandolin

You never got around to learning how to play it. And that's a plus. This is the Baileys Irish Cream of musical instruments.



YOU CAN LIVE without whatever's in there. No exceptions. If you really cared about it, you'd have it in your home—and not pay someone else to warehouse it. There are better ways of preserving your identity than shutting vintage peacoats and motorcycle helmets into an airless room. Really, all you need in life is a spoon, a pair of jeans, and a toothbrush.

SOMETHICS BETTER



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ON THEIR OWN TERMS



Sometimes you'll quit and then regret it.

You'll survive, but it may gnaw at you. That's life. Especially for those of us who bailed on a guaranteed chick-magnet move.

I NEVER WOULD HAVE been a great guitar player. I'm uncoordinated. My fingers are too fat. I lack an intuitive grasp of music theory and time signatures. Those are just some of the reasons I quit taking guitar lessons in high school (though laziness was the chief culprit). I know I never would have been Hendrix. But oh, if I had just bothered to TRY. If I had actually sat down and practiced and coarsened my fingertips to the point where reaching over four frets wasn't complete agony, maybe I could have been competent. Maybe I could have been one of those guys who can pick up any guitar and shred. I hate those guys and so do you, but I bet BEING one of those guys is the best feeling in the world.

There are certain skills—golf, foreign languages, musical instruments—that are easier learned when you are a child. Once you get older, your aptitude seems to disappear. It feels as if the light will never go on, no matter how hard you try. I wish I had stuck with it. I wish I could spontaneously serenade a hot girl with "Fare Thee Well" while standing outside her window. That would be a baller move. When you quit something, you leave unanswered forever any question about what could have been, and it hurts. Almost as much as an open C chord.—DREW MAGARY

Are you a quitter? Take this quiz to find out.

Which best describes how you felt at the end of Rudu?

- a. "I am inspired by the limitless potential of the human condition." b. "I'm crying an awful lot for a
- grown man.' c. "What's the big goddamn deal, he played like twelve seconds."

This book sucks. What do you do?

- a. Finish it anyway. Reading is not about instant gratification.
- **b.** Skim the remainder, stopping only at the parts with sex or cool murders. c. Throw it out and see if there's a movie,
- particularly one with sex or cool murders.

The vet's diagnosis on your 14-year-old dog isn't good. You:

- a. Spare no expense. that dog is family.
- b. Spare some expense, that dog is like 250 in dog years.
- c. Stop him at the word "operation," throw some money on the table, walk out of the room.

Your team is down five runs in the seventh. You tell vourself:

a. "It ain't over till

it's over."

- **b.** "Ugh, this is over. But I paid for the tickets-might as well stay
- c. "Traffic's a nightmare; good thing I left in the sixth."

Chappelle

to ditch fame

and fortune

to preserve his

sanity.

J. D. Salinger

MOSTLY a's: You never quit. Maybe you should live a little. MOSTLY b's: You quit, but you're not a quitter.

MOSTLY c's: You're a quitter. We're amazed you read this far.

FORCED OUT

The Disapproval Matrix

A gallery of famous quitters and their circumstances of departure



Has left Van Halen twenty-eight times.

well over fifty-five.

Barry Sanders

Virtually the only

jock in sports history to bail in

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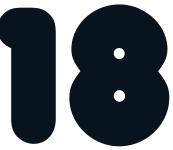
Forget about sunk costs. It doesn't matter how much you've invested in something. You're only concerned with what happens going forward.

Do it in person. People are always looking for excuses to blame you for quitting on them, and "He couldn't even do it to my face" is a popular one.

Okay, under certain conditions a phone call will suffice. Your cable company, your fruit-of-the-month club: The folks at these fine institutions do not require a personal farewell.

But no texting.

And definitely no emojis, unless the poop with eyes is somehow topically relevant (in which case, yeah, good job getting outta there).



Sometimes quitting feels more like firing people, even if you're the one walking away. And each case has its own etiquette.

HOW TO QUIT...



...Your barber

Yeah, he's cleaned up your neckline for years, and you act like bros when you're in the chair. But this guy's not gonna get sentimental about you hitting the bricks. You can just stop going. Or tell him a courtesy lie. like you're moving away—he'll never be the wiser. Degree of



difficulty: easy.

...Your doctor or dentist

Remember: These guys work for you. If your docs aren't helpful and attentivebasically, if you leave feeling worse than you did when you came in—say so. If nothing changes, make an appointment to pull the plug. Before vou go, request your records. (Now you can finally peek inside your file.) Degree of difficulty: hard.



Don't stay with your money man if you're not making money. This is your life savings! Point to the numbers and tell Gordon Gekko you're transferring vour investments to another firm. Have the new guy's information handy; there'll be paperwork. Degree of difficulty:



moderate

...Your babysitter or nanny

You know you'll eventually part ways with your nanny. So go to Care.com and download a caregiver's contract, adding an end date. Already hired a nanny without a contract? Give generous severance. Your kid's surrogate parent is now unemployed. Degree of difficulty: Maybe your wife can do it? -RACHAFI MADDUX

Etiquette consultants: Peggy Newfield, Peter Post, and Jodyne L. Speyer, author of Dump 'Em: How to Break Up with Anyone from Your Best Friend to Your Hairdresser

You should

maybe quit drinking if...

1. Your burps taste like puke even when you're not drunk.

2. You wake up in a piss-soaked bed. as an adult, and think, "Again?"—then follow a wellrehearsed regimen to deal with it.

3. You pocket beers from the refrigerator at a party and hide them in different areas of the host's home so you'll be "covered" in case they "run out" (of their own beer that they bought at the store with their money).

-ROB DELANEY, author of Rob Delaney: Mother. Wife. Sister. Human. Warrior. Falcon. Yardstick. Turban. Cabbage.



You can stop watching Homeland now.

I USED TO BE LIKE YOU. I was your original hanger-in-there. Íf I watched a TV show twice, I'd watch it to the bitter end. I've lavished more time on foundering TV shows than you have on good ones, so trust me when I say this: You don't have to live this way. A TV show is not a spouse who drinks too much or a dog who barks when you crate it—The Americans is not going to stop being utter bullshit because you give it unconditional love. Í now quit TV shows right and left, and it feels stupendous, as Biggie Smalls would have said had he lived to endure the third season of Homeland. It started when I cut bait on The Killing after three episodes; when the season finale went down and everybody

started rending their garments, l felt like l'd sold a garbage stock before it tanked. I did the same with Downton Abbeu, and then a few seasons later I checked back in for a minute and everybody was busy searching for a fucking letter opener. Sure, I've missed out on some lively online discoursebut if you ever hear me utter the words "But I'll miss out on the lively online discourse!" please grab a letter opener and stab me in the eye. And don't get me wrong: Ít's not like I spent all that newfound time hiking in a wildflower grove or playing with my kid. I spent it watching other TV shows. But there's such a thing as time well wasted. -ALEX PAPPADEMAS

FRIENDSHIP Too soon to quit: Your college buddy throws up at your bachelor party. Time to quit: Your college buddy throws up during your wedding vows.

CREW. Official Supplier to Men.





Quitting your marriage doesn't retroactively make it a mistake.

I'LL NEVER FORGET:

We were parked in a rental car on an Italian street, fighting through what was supposed to be a vacation to reconnect, and she came out and said it. We don't work anymore. she said. We don't want the same life. she said. Tell me I'm wrong.

I told her she was wrong. Divorce is failure. Divorce is for quitters. Marriage means spending your entire life with someone, then dying simultaneously of old age while holding hands, just like they do in The Notebook. For months I refused to consider splitting up. Yeah, maybe we'd changed, maybe we weren't happy anymore, but we'd made a promise.

In time I realized that what we promised to do, if I really thought about our wedding vows, was to love each other. And that sometimes the most selfless act of love is to divorceto give your partner permission to be the person she wants to be. The woman I married now gets to

have the kids I never wanted, gets to be happy in ways l simply couldn't make her. The reverse is also true. I get to live in New York, a town she could never warm to. Our lives couldn't move on until we let each other go, and it's better now that we have. I'm sure there are people who will say I'm rationalizing. That's fine. I still think of my marriage as a success, even if it had to end. The failure would've been staying together just because we said we would. -NICK MARINO

The conversation is usually more difficult if the other party has seen your penis.

You can always quit something now and finish it later. Just like **Brian Wilson** did with Smile.

Nothing is forever. Not even tattoos. However, removing one is not gonna be easy.

DID YOU ENJOY

that needle they used to put the tattoo on? You'll love the laser that takes it off. What happens is that for a fraction of a second, a dermatologist fires enough energy at your skin to power Las Vegas. The laser shatters the ink particles into tinier

ones, which are then extruded through your skin and carried away by the immune system to your waste organs. Cool, right? And removal only takes five to fifteen sessions! Of course, there'll be some scabbing. But hey, probably not scarring! That is,

unless you count the way tattoo removal ravages vour bank account. Inking yourself with the Insane Clown Posse logo costs a couple of hundred bucks; removal can cost hundreds per treatment.-J.V



And then l've gotta do my back.

You will feel better when it's over.



→ Are You Man

Enough for the Men's

Albert Calabrese believes the age

of consent should

be 12 years old.

Rights Movement?



Probably not, at least according to a growing army of pissed-off activists who are convinced that the male species is profoundly endangered by our feminized society. They say it's a woman's world now-that women have the upper hand in sex, in universities, in custody battles. And don't even get them started on all those "bogus" rape cases. It's enough to make a certain kind of man ioin a revolution.

JEFF SHARLET
reports from the
movement's first
national gathering
and meets the true
believers who want
you to fight for your
right to patriarchy

"WHAT IS 'the manosphere'?" I ask Paul Elam around three one morning. This is not a factual question. It's an existential one.

I already know that "the manosphere" refers to an online network, nascent but vast and like the universe constantly expanding, each twinkling star in its firmament dedicated—obviously—to men. Men and their problems. Usually with women. Some galaxies of the manosphere are composed of self-declared "pickup"

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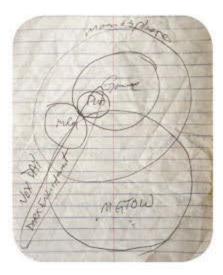


artists" (PUAs) who want to help ordinary guys trick women into bed; other solar systems deal earnestly with child custody and the Adderallization of rambunctious boys. There are constellations of MGTOWs, "men going their own way," separatists and onanists and recluses. There are hundreds of websites and blogs, many openly hostile-SlutHate, Angry Harry, The Spearhead, NiceGuy's American Women Suck Page-and many more that are brutally lewd. For instance: Return of Kings, published by the author of a series of popular country guides such as Bang Ukraine: How to Sleep with Ukrainian Women in Ukraine.

As the flagship political site of the movement (it had just shy of 9 million site visits last year), Elam's A Voice for Men functions as the closest thing there is to a center, an intelligence, a superego to the bloggy manosphere id of lust and fury. Just how big the whole thing is, nobody can say. More than fringe, less than mainstream, but at 3 A.M., sitting with Elam in his hotel room, I'm not looking for numbers. Size doesn't matter. What I'm really asking is, What does it all mean?

Elam has just wrapped up a conference. "An eye popper," he says, the first time he's brought A Voice for Men off the Internet and into the flesh. He likes to say, "You can't fight titty hall," but that's exactly what he's doing. He's fucking shit up. That's his slogan: "Fuck their shit up." "They" being feminists. Six eight, 290 pounds, with the beard of John Brown and the rumbling voice of James Earl Jones, Elam, whose name happens to be "male" backward, wants to be a provocateur. Responding to a feminist critic, he once wrote, "The idea of fucking your shit up gives me an erection." But that kind of

talk is just for show, he says. He points out he used to be a counselor. What he's doing, really, is a kind of therapy. He wants me to understand. So he draws a map of the manosphere, alluding to its origins as he sketches: its roots in the men's liberation movement of the 1970s and '80s-auxiliary to the much larger women's movementand the New Agey men's movement of the '90s, its coming of age online, when Elam first started posting under the name Lester Burnham, Kevin Spacey's midlife-crisis character in American Beauty, its explosive growth since he founded A Voice for Men in 2008. Refuge, reaction, and fantasyland, practical advice and political calculation, identity and secret identity, cold fact and hot ambition. It's so complex not even Elam can map it neatly:



He holds up his rendering. The semblance is clear. "A dick and balls," I say. "Yes," he says, chuckling, "I guess it is."

IF YOU'VE HEARD OF the manosphere, it may have been in the context of Elliot Rodger, the 22-year-old self-described "supreme gentleman" who on May 23, 2014. in Isla Vista, California, murdered six people. In a YouTube video he posted the day he stabbed to death three men in his apartment and opened fire on a sorority house at UC Santa Barbara, he declared the slaughter a "Day of Retribution," revenge for the world's failure to provide him "the beautiful girlfriend I know I deserve." Rodger was a student of several manosphere philosophies, but his most active connection was through a forum called PUAhate. Most of its members embrace MGTOWdom after trying and failing to adopt the ways of the pickup artists—hence the "hate"—at which point their bitterness brings the angriest of them to the politics of Elam. Some of A Voice for Men's biggest web traffic days followed Rodger's murder spree. The media attention surrounding the Isla Vista shootings was a twofold gift for the group, driving new recruits to the movement and allowing A Voice for Men to present itself as the moderate middle. Some men tried to distance themselves from Rodger with a hashtag, #notallmen. Many more women-a million within days-responded with #yesallwomen, as in, yes, all women have experienced variations of the misogyny that led Rodger to his crimes. The manosphere did not like this. "Men are your benefactors, your protectors, and your providers," a writer at A Voice for Men explained. "So the next time you trend a hashtag about us, maybe you say 'thank you' instead."

A Voice for Men's first International Conference on Men's Issues convened a month after the killing. The issues were as varied as the manosphere: fathers' rights, suicide, and circumcision (a.k.a. male genital mutilation), and also false accusations of rape, male victims of rape, and unfaithful wives "cuckoo for cocoa penis puffs," as one speaker would put it, plus "mangina" journalists who "cherrypick" quotes such as "cuckoo for cocoa penis puffs" out of context. It was supposed to be at the Detroit DoubleTree, a

1. Context: a conference presentation by Terrence Popp, introduced as "infantry soldier, former professional fighter, college graduate, author, poet, warrior, comedian" etc. a decorated combat veteran whom the conference introducer notes is "top" or "expert" with the following weapons: MK19, M16, M203 grenade launcher, pistol, M60, SAW. "I'm not the guy you want pissed off," says Popp, who while speaking on veterans and suicide suggests the audience "imagine coming back from war to find out your wife-I'm trying to think of a good way to say this, but, uh, you know, went cuckoo for cocoa penis puffs." I think Popp, who is white, means the wife in question had sex with a black man. "Crazy for some Rice Krispies treats," he continues, "and a couple Polish sausages thrown in there."

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 Kristal Garcia, a former sex worker, is a Honey Badger—a woman dedicated to the movement.

swank downtown hotel, but the feminists protested, and since the elite hospitality industry is pretty much in the thrall of feminism, or because the feminists floated death threats, or because a member of the men's movement floated death threats so people would understand that the feminists are floating death threats even if they did not, in this instance, float any death threats-for one of these disturbing reasons, A Voice for Men was told by the DoubleTree to "go elsewhere."

Elsewhere is a town called St. Clair Shores, and in it a VFW, Post 1146, known as "the Bruce." As in the sign out front that declares, CRUISING AT THE BRUCE / EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT / 5-9 р.м. (By "cruising" they mean muscle cars, a fact I mention because A Voice for Men is surprisingly pro-gay, or at least anti-anti-gay.) There's artillery on the lawn and a faded sign on a fence around a parking lot: warning, of what, to whom, it is not clear. The blacktop beyond, where conference attendees line up to go through "security," is broken with weeds, but the men don't notice the decline in the conference's circumstances. They're too excited about "security." They keep saying, "No feminist better try coming here!" Local police have dispatched four officers, and the conference attendees have deputized even more security from their own ranks. "Security" wears black polo shirts, and there are a lot of black polo shirts, but since the line is slow, security decides to sweep us all in with a request to return for a "check." Nobody does. Only one feminist later attempts entry, an activist who goes by the handle "Dark Horse Swore." The black shirts eighty-six her. She sets up at a nearby bar, orders pizza, opens a tab, and invites any conference attendee who cares to talk. No takers. Feminist pizza? Not a chance. These men, they're hip to feminine wiles. They've taken the red pill, they like to say.

The red-pill moment, explains one men's rights activist (MRA), "is the day you decide nothing looks the same." It's what the movement calls the born-again experience of opening your eyes to women's Matrix-like control of the modern world. For a young MRA named Max von Holtzendorff, the red-pill moment was being accused of sexual harrassment by a co-worker to whom he proposed sex. "being blunt and forthright, because that seemed the best way to ensure consent." For Dan Perrins, one of the security black shirts, it was the day he ended up in jail, after he says he lodged a complaint against his ex, the beginning of a legal battle that led him to a hunger strike. "I should have killed the bitch five years ago," he tells me. "I'd be out by now." For Gunther Schadow, an M.D.-Ph.D., it was a "meta-study" on domestic violence that inspired him to seed a foundation with about half a million dollars, with which he now hopes to overturn the Violence Against Women Act. For Dan Moore, whose MRA name is Factory, the red pill was a revelation in stages. First, he says, his wife cheated on him. Then she wanted him to know it. "She'd laugh at me." His low point: lying on the floor in a fetal curl while she stood over him mocking him. He says she had a butcher knife in her hand. (She denies this. All of it.)

"Women gone insane with the power of the *pussy pass*" is how Elam describes the movement's raison d'être in an essay called "When Is It OK to Punch Your Wife?" Another one of his provocations. Elam's white, but he identifies with Malcolm X; he believes he needs to shock society to be heard. He says his talk of "the business end of a right hook" and women who are "freaking begging" to be raped is simply his version of Malcolm's "by any means necessary." To wit: Elam's proposal to make October "Bash a Violent Bitch Month," in which men should take the women who abuse them "by the hair and smack their face against the wall till the smugness of beating on someone because you know they won't fight back drains from their nose with a few million red corpuscles."

ELAM DESCRIBES such language as satire. Then again, one evening in a bar, he tells me that he stands by every word he says. A group of us have gathered with pitchers of beer at a place near the VFW-"You could get into a fistfight here," Elam

says cheerfully-and the classic rock is rocking, but Elam's deep voice has gone soft and thoughtful. "It's a David-and-Goliath kind of deal," he says. He's David, personally confronting the Goliath of Womanhood, his "provocations" his sling. And just as in the biblical story, it's not so much about killing Goliath as giving hope to his people. This, to Elam, is how his provocations work: "satire" that's really rage that's really a beacon, a Bat Signal—calling all broken men. "Men who've decided to check out because they can't take it anymore, guys going to live in their cars because they have nowhere to go," he says. "I get e-mails from people who say, 'I was suicidal until I found your website and realized I wasn't alone."

Factory raises his beer to Elam. "This guy saved my life," he says. It was two years ago; Factory had taken the red pill by then, but marriage, kids, and family court still proved too much for him. He decided to do himself in. He sent off one last e-mail, to Elam. "Just seemed the guy I knew who'd sorta understand." Elam did; he called the police, who were able to intervene in time.

To Elam it's clear how satire and solace, threat and solidarity, bleed into one another. It's the world that's confused, addled by feminism. He refers me to the man who provided him his own red pill, in the form of a book, 1993's The Myth of Male Power. "We have long acknowledged the slavery of blacks," writes author Warren Farrell, Ph.D., whom Elam sees as speaking the gentler truth of his same message, a white MLK to Elam's white Malcolm. "We have yet to acknowledge the slavery of males."2

They have evidence. Men, particularly poor and working-class men, are cannon fodder abroad and expendable labor at home, trapped beneath a glass floor in jobs nobody really wants—farm workers, roofers, garbagemen-and injured at far higher rates than women. Imprisoned at far higher rates, too, and more often the victims of violent crime. Men get hit by women nearly as often as the other way around (even if the damage done is decidedly one-sided). And there is almost no refuge for battered men, unless you count homeless shelters. Men, meanwhile,

2. Farrell really is a gentle character. In the daylong pre-conference workshop he leads, we make massage circles we close our eyes and think of our fathers, we role-play explaining men's rights to the one woman taking part in the session. One cover of Farrell's book depicts the title, The Myth of Male Power, in big red letters over a shadowy photograph of a naked woman, the "Power" said to belong to men breaking into pieces across her ass. Men are slaves to "female beauty," he says, and thus enslaved in every sphere of life. Freedom, to Farrell, begins with men having a say over their own sexual destinies by finding a way to "enter the woman," as he explains to me later, with masculine dignity intact.



MARK NASON FOOTWEAR



by far make up the largest contingent of homeless people.3

The irony of the men's rights movement is that its critique, its focus on the constraints of gender, is essentially a feminist one. No less an arch-feminist than the late Andrea Dworkin—a "300-plus-pound basilisk of man-hate" who just "wanted to be raped," according to Elam-critiqued the idea of men as "disposable" in her 1983 book Right-Wing Women, ten years before The Myth of Male Power. "Feminism," wrote Dworkin, "proposes one absolute standard of human dignity, indivisible by sex."

"Nope," says the manosphere. Or rather, "I can't hear vou!" A number of men at the conference tell me that women's-studies programs teach The SCUM Manifesto, a 1967 screed advocating the elimination of men. That's true, I say-it's taught as an artifact. I know, because my wife has taught it in a women's-studies program. And she's not trying to eliminate me.

Several men look at me sadly. "If only you knew," one says. Another hugs me. "This is a safe space," he says.

ON THE SECOND FLOOR of the Bruce there's a mostly empty meeting hall, robin's-egg blue walls beneath a low paneled ceiling, three brass seagulls next to an unused bar, and at the back of the room, selling swag, the women of the men's rights movement. Not girlfriends and wives. They are the Honey Badgers, their name taken from a viral YouTube video of the actual creature shrugging off first a swarm of bees, then the bite of a cobra in the pursuit of its prey. "Honey badger don't give a shit," says the voice-over. Such is the slogan of the Honey Badgers, who do not give a shit for the opinions of other women and their mangina friends.

The leader of this pack is a woman named Alison Tieman, a.k.a. Typhon Blue, a nom de guerre borrowed from a mythical Greek monster with a hundred dragon heads. She is small and sour and wise, 37 years old, married to a man who she says was once the victim of an attempted gang rape by a mob of 16-year-old girls. He was 22, and cute, and they tried to stop him from leaving a party. "He actually had to escape," she says. "They drew blood."

Up with Ayn, Down with Bey: A Men's Rights Guide to Pop Culture

TWO BIG THUMBS UP!

FEMINAZI GARBAGE



American Beauty. In a favorite scene, Kevin Spacey smashes a plate against the wall and says to his wife, "Don't interrupt me, honey." In the silence that follows. he smiles and returns to dinner, order restored.



Maleficent. A toxic stew of "anti-male propaganda" that can be summed up as "women-good, because magic. Men-bad, because beards," says MRA icon Stefan Molyneux.



Atlas Shrugged. Famous for its male protagonist, who simply takes what is his. Writes Rand: "She knew that fear was useless, that he would do what he wished, that the decision was his."



Fifty Shades of Grey. "Exposes the hypocrisy of screaming that we live in a 'rape culture' while millions of women devoured this rapey garbage," savs AVfM's managing editor, Dean Esmay.



The hits range from Cee Lo's "Fuck You" to Robin Thicke's "Blurred Lines"-–"This is our song!" cried an MRA during the conference.



"If I Were a Boy," by Beyoncé. Says Esmay: "Hasn't got the faintest idea of how tough life as a boy can really be, obviously."—J.S.

There's also Jess Kenney, a doe-eyed young mom who says her red-pill moment was giving birth to a boy. That was when she started to worry. "Can someone take advantage of him?" she asks. "You know, make accusations against him, for things

Or he could be raped, offers Typhon Blue. "And have no recourse."

"It's largely invisible," a Badger named Rachel Edwards says, blinking rapidly as she thinks of all the false accusations against the men who are most vulnerable to predatory females. "It'll often happen in colleges. A guy will wake up and be like, 'You weren't there before, what are you doing here?' And then they don't know who to talk to about what's happened."

I want to say that I think I read that story in Penthouse Forum when I was 13. Typhon Blue reads my mind. She wants me to know this isn't funny. She says, "If a woman puts a gun to a man's head and says, 'I'm not even on the pill. And I have gonorrhea. I'm fucking you now.' That's not rape? 'I want a child-support payment,' gun to his head. That's not rape?"

It is, I say. That would be rape. If it happened. And it does, they tell me. It's happening right now. Why haven't I heard about it? Because the feminists

don't want me to. The Badgers summon up numbers and stories and facts. Kristal Garcia, a former sex worker and founder of a group first called Cock Consciousness and then Loving & Celebrating Men, tells me that "in Africa" there are "female gang-rapers" who abduct men and use "friction" to produce involuntary erections; in Nigeria, says Kenney, a man was raped to death by six wives; "And wait," says Edwards, "do we wanna mention there's that woman who has AIDS in Africa and she's just having sex with a bunch of men? Giving them AIDS?" Typhon Blue talks about the Congo, about men whose throats are slit, about machetes and ditches and the bodies of the disappeared.

They say they will send me studies. Science. A whole bottle of red pills. I write down my e-mail with a shaky hand. "We are giving off a lot of information," Edwards says. "It can be overwhelming."

I TAKE A BREAK on the balcony of the VFW, a blistering hot slab of concrete speckled in bird shit. In the near distance, a parking lot; beyond, Lake St. Clair. There's a plume of smoke on the other side; something is burning. My phone buzzes with a text message from my friend Blair, who's

^{3.} Of course, these are largely economic conditions, but conference speaker Helen Smith, Ph.D., in her book Men on Strike-a door prize throughout the weekend-describes the problem as "female privilege": schools drugging the boyishness out of boys and workplaces promoting underqualified women, leaving men dumb, doped, and too broke to afford what one of Smith's sources-echoing Elliot Rodger-describes as "an expensive bitch." To men "on strike," those who refuse to marry or to work to avoid alimony-"going Galt," in the movement's Ayn Randian parlancewomen are the economic condition, singular.

IT IS NOT THE CRITIC WHO COUNTS:

THE CREDIT BELONGS
TO THE MAN WHO IS
ACTUALLY IN THE ARENA.

WHO STRIVES VALIANTLY;

WHO ERRS, WHO COMES SHORT AGAIN AND AGAIN:

WHO KNOWS
GREAT ENTHUSIASMS;

WHO SPENDS HIMSELF IN A WORTHY CAUSE:

WHO AT THE BEST KNOWS IN THE END

THE TRIUMPH OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT,

AND WHO AT THE WORST,

IF HE FAILS, AT LEAST FAILS WHILE DARING GREATLY.





Sage Gerard publishes cartoons on A Voice for Men's site. One features a nice guy asking a girl for a date. "Nice try, loser," she says. A buzzcut bro appears. "C'mere, skank," he says. The girl falls to her knees. "I want your cock," she says.

downstairs. Blair lives in Wisconsin, and when I told her I'd be in a Detroit suburb for the conference, she and her boyfriend, Quince, decided to tag along. They both write about gender; they thought it would be interesting. She's 26, blue-eyed and rosy-cheeked, and one of the very few women here; an irony of the conference is that there are several men only willing to talk to me because I've been vouched for by a woman. "T-shirt guy is REALLY excited to talk to you," she texts. I know the shirt she means: hand-drawn in red fabric paint, the kind kids use, a thin white tee with the legend inscribed across the narrow back of the wearer-FREE ROBERT MAYNARD.

He who would free one Robert Maynard is named Albert Calabrese. He finds me with the Honey Badgers, but he keeps his distance. He knows who Typhon Blue is, has watched the videos she's posted online in which she discusses the sexual abuse of boys by women. Calabrese does not exactly share her concern. His issue is girls. His friend Robert Maynard, he says, is in prison because of one. She was 14. "He received a naked picture of her," Calabrese says, his vowels rounded and clipped, his indignation over the verb-receivedmaking his eyes wide.

Like Calabrese, Maynard was a graduate student in physics at the University of Arkansas. Together they studied black holes. They talked about men's issues. But Calabrese didn't know his friend was in trouble until Maynard announced he was leaving school. For prison. Ten years. He didn't even touch the girl, Calabrese says.

Not that he may not want to do more, believes Calabrese. He says Maynard might argue that 14 is sexually mature, that he thinks the age of consent should be the average age of menarche: 12.3. "He likes women," Calabrese says. "He does not unlike women just because

they're young." Calabrese does not unlike preteen girls, either.

But this is not a conversation to have with Typhon Blue around, so we wait until after lunch, when I catch his eye across the VFW lobby. Or maybe he catches mine. He's good at this kind of communication. A barely perceptible nod, not a wink but a flicker, and it's like we've agreed. We both leave the hall and make for the shore. Dead fish slap against the crumbling concrete lining the lake's edge. Gusting wind does nothing to dissipate the heat or the smell.

There is a point on which he disagrees with Maynard, Calabrese says, Calabrese thinks 12.3 as an age of consent is too old. He'd go with 12. "I would rather err on the side of 12-year-olds having sex than on the side of ruining men's lives."

He doesn't deny that there are cases of real abuse. But he suspects that adult men are better lovers for young girls than boys their own age. "The teenage boy is, I would suspect, more interested in sex." Whereas the adult would be interested in "substance," he says. "Or even a mentorprotégée relationship." Teenage boys, he says, brag.

"Maynard didn't brag?" I ask.

Calabrese laughs. "No!" Then, under his breath, "That would be silly."

Calabrese does not brag. Not really. "I'm easily Googleable," he says. He is: Albert J. Calabrese Jr., a former substitute teacher in Akron, Ohio, arrested for felony sexual misconduct with a minor. "My chick wasn't a student," he claims. "She asked me out." He thought it would help his case if he told the police she was more experienced than he was. "I was remarkably naive," he says. He didn't know he had a right to remain silent. He's never watched cop shows. Such programs, he says, "are emotionally frustrating to me." He says you shouldn't take pleasure in others' suffering.

He wishes he didn't feel what he feels. Not because he believes these feelings are wrong, but because the world does. He would like to be part of the world. Right now, he's not. A sex offender. Unemployable. He can't live where he wants. He can't say what he really thinks. He can't, he believes, be fully human.

He stands on the concrete shore, cocks his black-jeaned hips, and spreads his arms wide, embracing the water, his back to the world. Letting us read: FREE ROBERT MAYNARD. Calabrese drove fourteen and a half hours to be here, he took uppers, and he's still taking them; he's pale and dappled with cold sweat under the hot gray sun.

INSIDE, BLAIR IS at the bar, buying a drink-your choice of Coke or water, one dollar per cup—when Sage Gerard, collegiate-activism director of A Voice for Men, wearing the all-black outfit of the conference security force, decides it's time to talk with her. Sage is not a pickup artist. He's the nice guy. Tall, square-jawed, blue-eyed. He asks what Blair finds exciting about men's rights activism. What does she want to learn about? She says she's surprised that she hasn't heard more about rape.

Sage says—according to the notes Blair says she asked Sage if she could take: "You wanted to hear more about rape? Ooh, you're freaky."

Blair: "What do you mean?"

Sage: "What do you want it to mean?"

Blair says she wants to hear more about false accusations, because a friend of hers, Bryan,* has recently been accused, and for the first time she thinks the accusation may be false. She doesn't know. That, according to her notes, is what she wants to understand.

Sage wants to help. He'd like her to come with him. They need someplace private. He has an idea, he tells her. He wants her to write a poem. A poem for her friend, a poem for men falsely accused. It would be best, he says, if she writes it now.

He wants to sit in a stairwell. A quiet place. But Badgers keep stepping between them. Come with me, he says. He takes her to the balcony, the hot concrete, and she sits down, and he pulls his chair close.

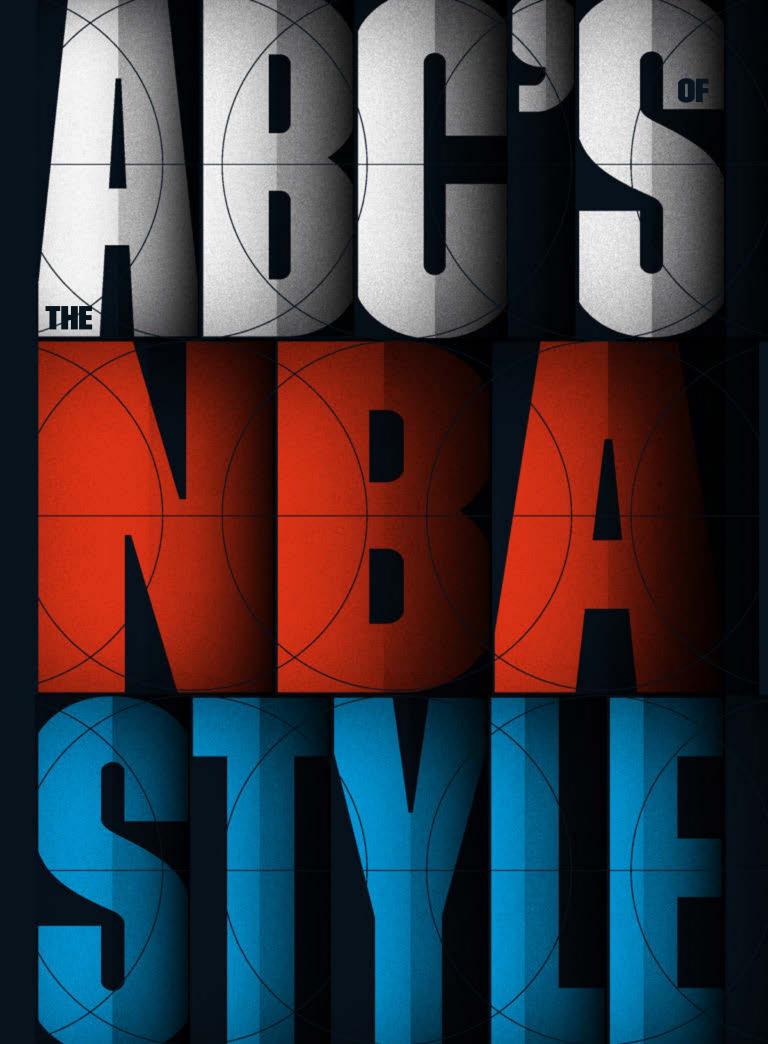
Blair tells him she's not sure what to write about her friend Bryan. "You do want to make an emotional impact," Sage says. He touches her hand. He wants her to empathize with Bryan. He will teach her how. He suggests that they write an opening together. He closes his eyes, licks his lips, waiting for Blair to begin.

"Bryan," she says, "I hope you're not lyin'." (continued on page 210)

^{*}Name has been changed.







Baseball may be our national pastime—
emphasis on past. Football may be our
billion-dollar addiction—if you ignore all the
ways that it's gotten kinda evil. But from Dr. J
to Allen Iverson to LeBron James, basketball has
always been a stage for our slickest superstars and
a breeding ground for what's next in our culture.
GQ presents an illustrated history of the NBA—the
coolest, most stylish league under the sun



No one dresses like *Allen Iverson* anymore—you could fit Russell Westbrook's entire wardrobe in one leg of A.I.'s sweatpants. But without him, the NBA wouldn't look half as good as it does today.

Allen Iverson may never

have been the NBA's clear-cut best player, but in his day he was easily its most influential. A.I. was a herky-jerky blur, a dazzling scorer whose every move would've been YouTubeworthy if YouTube had existed then. Depending on whom you ask, he either ruined a generation of young players or infused the game with a much needed dose of street sensibility.

He did it off the court, too. Iverson changed the way the NBA dressed—throwback jerseys, oversize sweats, do-rags, big-ass chains, fresh sneakers—and the result was hysteria. Iverson was branded a thug, and his sagging pants represented the decline of American civilization, prompting NBA commissioner David Stern's dress code in 2005. But the reaction to that was unexpected: Players responded to it by learning to dress like fashion plates. Every style-conscious, well-tailored NBA playereveryone, in other words, that you'll see over the next twentyone pages—has Allen Iverson to thank. - BETHLEHEM SHOALS



Fig. 1



g. 2 F





Boogie is Sacramento's DeMarcus "Boogie" Cousins (right), the Brow is New Orleans's Anthony Davis, and they're the two best young bigs in the NBA. Even better: When you combine their nicknames, it sounds like a baller '70s cop show.



Now. "It's been a tough first half of the season for our team. Better days are ahead for the Knicks. That said, winning always feels good, so thanks, *GQ*!"



LARRY BROWN: The Best-Dressed Coach Ever. Check him out during his '70s ABA days. Like finding out your dad kicked it at Altamont.



Actual photograph #1
Checkered slacks!

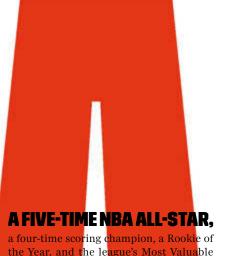
Actual photograph #2 **Dungarees!**

Actual photograph #3
Stripy sweater!









a four-time scoring champion, a Rookie of the Year, and the league's Most Valuable Player walk into a coffee shop in San Francisco's Mission District as the sun is still burning off the fog, and the cashier says: "Name, please?"

Kevin Durant looks down at her from a vast height, something resembling relief on his face. Then he turns to me, like: *Let me enjoy this*.

So I give my name instead. The kind woman behind the counter says the tall gentleman's hot chocolate will be ready momentarily. My coffee, too. Durant says his mom used to wake him up at three in the morning and make him go to 7-Eleven to get her a coffee. At 10 years old. He was like, *Damn, this is what caffeine does to a person?* Still doesn't drink it. Prefers hot chocolate—a 26-year-old with the taste buds of a 10-year-old boy.

That's the reputation, right? Basketball freak, a man on the court but still a child off it? Momma's boy. Too nice to hurt anybody, ever.

Well. Not exactly.

Take the conversation we're having right now. Two guys on stools in a coffee shop talking about girls. His heart still not quite right after hurting someone he loved. "I had a fiancée, but...I really didn't know how to, like, love her, you know what I'm saying? We just went our separate ways." Monica Wright, WNBA player, something like a high school sweetheart. One night Kevin got so full of feelings he just up and proposed to her. "We was just hanging out, chilling. And I felt the energy. I felt, I need to do this right now. And I just did it. I was like... We're engaged right now? We're about to get married? So I was just like, cool! I love this girl. But I didn't love her the right way."

Outside this coffee shop, there are multiple millions of people representing multiple millions of dollars—shoe companies, league executives, agents, little kids with big KD posters on their walls—with opinions on what he should and should not be saying at this particular moment. A whole universe bending to be like: Talk about your will to succeed. Your work in the community. How you know what it takes to win.

But what he wants to say right now is this: "I go to sleep at night, like, 'Am I gonna be alone forever?" A whole ocean of regret.

His life too hectic, and too surrounded by money, to trust, let alone love, the next person who comes through that door.

"Am I gonna be alone forever? Am I gonna have kids?"

Almost seven feet tall, body like God wanted him to be this good.

"I feel like there's no hope. But I still gotta have faith."

A few years ago, he probably wouldn't have said any of this out loud. But he likes himself more than he used to. Likes talking this way. A sad subject, sure, but he's not sad to talk about it. Talking about it is freedom.



THE REIGNING MVP. Gets picked first or second in the all-galaxy pickup game, depending on how you feel about LeBron. Immortality a championship or two away. Already in that weird place where nothing he says or does belongs just to him. His basic decency—try to find tape of this guy throwing a tantrum, or even rolling his eyes at a coach or a teammate—turned into a flaw (He's too nice to win a championship!) and then, worse, an actual Nike marketing campaign (#KDISNOTNICE). His inner life subject to our feelings of ownership.

For example, the bracingly generous MVP speech he gave last spring. "One of the greatest off-the-floor moments in NBA history," Bill Simmons called it. I agree.

He didn't practice it. Had a piece of paper. Before going onstage, he wrote: "Mom. Teammates."

"Then I had, right under 'Teammates,' there was another bullet point that said 'Russell. [Thunder coach] Scott Brooks. Thank the media. Thank the fans.'"

Gets up in front of the cameras with no real idea of what he's going to say. Looks down at the paper, sees *Mom*. "And it was like, all right."

He gets to his mom and can't get the words out. A whole nation wide-eyed at the moment.

You went to sleep hungry. You sacrificed for us. You the real MVP....

You the real MVP. People repeating it in awe at work the next day. And then in a week, less than a week, people repeating it with heretic glee, joking about it even. It becomes a punch line, something guys on Reddit say to one another. A virtual high five over a comic Vine. You the real MVP, person who actually pays for Netflix.

"I was like, man, that was a real emotional moment for me, and you making a joke about it! Like: Damn. Y'all don't really believe in shit. You don't have no morals or nothing. You don't care about nothing but just making fun."

How are you supposed to act in the world, when people feel entitled even to a moment like that?

"I was serious as hell saying that, you know what I'm saying?"

The nicest guy in the league exhales.

"But after a while, it's all good."

What matters is that he said it.

He came offstage and his mom said, "I didn't know you felt that way about me!"



HE WAS RAISED TO THINK, "If I do something wrong, I'm going to hell." Then he met Carl Lentz, who ministers to Justin Bieber and sometimes leads prayers before Knicks games. Carl taught him God was about love. But then you watch him enter the arena one Monday night in Oakland to play Golden State, something singularly lethal moving through the corridors of Oracle Arena—love isn't the first word that comes to mind. "When I'm on the court," he says, "I'm a total asshole. I'm a dick. I don't talk to the other team. If I fall on somebody, I throw them to the ground. I'm not helping them up."

"I JUST DON'T LIKE OTHER TEAMS OR OTHER PLAYERS. I CAN'T SIT THERE. I FEEL LIKE IN SUPPORTING THEM BY WATCHING IT. I HOPE YOU HAVE A BAD GAME. I'M SUCH A HATEN!"

I come from a small county outside of Washington, D.C., called PG County....

He thanks his teammates one by one. Saves Russell Westbrook, his Wile E. Coyote cartoon of a point guard, for last, as if maybe he forgot him entirely.

"I fucked with him a little bit on that," the nicest guy in the league says now, laughing.

I know you guys think I forgot Russ. But I could speak all night about Russell. An emotional guy who will run through a wall for me.... How do people not see this? he wonders. If people only knew how he really felt about things when the game is involved. This is a person who can hardly watch basketball when he's not playing it. "I just don't like other teams or other players. I can't sit there. I feel like I'm supporting them by watching it. I hope you have a bad game. Because I'm such a hater! I thought it was a bad trait I had. I was like, Man, am I jealous? Why do I hate this guy? But I hope both of the teams lose! That's how I feel."



Anyway, the Thunder get blown out in Oakland. As they will again, a couple of nights later, in Sacramento, before rebounding at home against the Utah Jazz. Strange season for the Thunder and Kevin Durant. Not quite right so far. Going back to Team USA this summer, which Durant was on, until one day he wasn't. A refreshingly self-interested decision, from a guy whose brand is never being self-interested. "I just didn't feel like playing. Simple. I was good, mentally, physically. I just wanted to have the rest of my summer to myself." Fair enough. But then he got hurt anyway. Durant fractured his right foot, missed seventeen games, came back, lit it up, injured his ankle, missed six more games, came back again. The Thunder now destined to spend the season scrapping just for an eight seed in a conference they were favored to win.

And lurking over it all, the question of where he'll be after his contract runs out in 2016. Everyone jockeying for his attention, his devotion, his loyalty. *Loyalty* being a word Kevin Durant has had to become wise to. "When players do stuff that benefits them, they're looked at as unloyal, selfish," Durant says. "But when a team decides to go the other way and cut a player, or not bring him back or not re-sign him, it's what's best for the team, and that's cool. But what we do is frowned upon, you know?"

Don't forget, Kevin Durant was not selfish: He signed a full extension in 2010, no opt-outs. He remembers that, even if no one else does, even as he anticipates the lurking storm of recrimination that awaits him if he doesn't re-up again. "I was loyal. If it comes down to that, I mean: I was. My deal's up in 2016. I'll have been here nine years. I could have easily wanted out. I could have easily not signed the extension after my rookie contract. I could have not played as hard every night. But people tend to forget."

Loyalty. Were the Thunder being loyal to Durant and his teammates when they traded James Harden, two and a half years ago, breaking up the best young core in the league in order to save a few luxurytax dollars? Has the team ever really given Durant what he needs to win? Durant has been asked this question so many times he may not realize that he's begun answering it honestly. "Players are paid to do their jobs, no matter who's on the court. And as superstars, you gotta lead what you have. You gotta make them better. Some players might be better than others. Some teams might be better than others. You gotta do your job, and you gotta trust that the front office is going to do their job. It's hard, though. You know what I'm saying? Because it's like, shit, I want to win. Obviously our players aren't as good as, you know, than they were before. But you have to figure it out."

So you can ask him about D.C., about the prospect of coming home, geography becoming destiny, destiny becoming dollars. But who knows, really? "I just don't know who's gonna be competitive, who's not gonna be, you know? That's why I can't really think too far in my mind. Because you don't know who's going to be where. It's something you can't control."



HE'S WORKING ON being an adult. He's doing it in full view of all of us. He's got to battle the Kevin Durant that all of us already think we know: infinitely obliging, infinitely loyal, *nice*. And he *is* nice. But nice like anyone else is nice—decent guys you went to high school with, co-workers you go halves on lunch with, that kind of nice. Not nice like the caricature that used to circulate: some angel of peace sent to the world's basketball courts to put up cruelty-free jump shots. Smiling, taking photos, always, always saying the quote-unquote right thing. "I didn't want to let anybody down. I didn't want to make anybody feel less than what they are."

Growing up where he grew up—moving every year, dad gone, the coach he loved shot in the back one day over nothing-certain things got put on hold away from the wood. Self-confidence, self-belief—something as simple as just saying no occasionally. "I had to learn that stuff as I grew. I just started really, like, feeling comfortable about three vears ago. Like I was smart enough to join a conversation with somebody." Took his first vacation ever, just this past summer. Maui. Zip-lining, scuba diving, volcanoes. Wine! He's been trying to get into wine. One night at dinner, a farm-to-table-type spot in Sacramento, he tries a red, which is new for him-until now it's been sweet whites. Barely touches the glass, but still.

We even trade drinking stories. (Calm down, shareholders in Kevin Durant. Deep breaths.) The one he tells involves a wedding, Don Julio, crutches, and waking up the next morning unable to vomit anywhere but over the side of his bed; mine involves a friend and an entire bottle of scotch, and he looks at me with big startled eyes and asks: How many shots in a bottle of scotch?

All these unanswered questions, still, like: How to become a man when everyone's watching? Or: What is burrata? What does whale taste like? He's been all over the world trying to figure it all out. "What's the craziest place you've been where you had to taste, like, a piece of their culture?" he asks me. "You been anywhere like that? Like outside of the country, maybe, and you had to really get into their culture? You ever been somewhere like that?"

The waiter comes by, the city of Sacramento teetering on his shoulders. Thunder-Kings game tomorrow night. "Take it easy on us tomorrow, okay?"

Kevin Durant knows the answer to this one. A sly smile.

"Can't do that, man."

.



Ink is meant to make a man look hard—you know, one teardrop for every body you've dropped, etc., etc. But here's what hard looks like to Atlanta's *Mike Scott:* a smiley face with hearts for eyes.



• Every NBA era gets the tattoos it deserves. J. R. Smith's tipto-toe full-body art nodded to an era of showboat excess when some guys seemed more than a little unhinged; Kevin Durant's "business tats" bespeak a moment when every player pulls double duty as his own brand ambassador. This year, the belt belongs to Atlanta Hawks forward Mike Scott, a true millennial in both outlook and ink. "Texting with my friends and family, I use a lot of emojis," he says. "I've had whole conversations with just emojis.

No words—thirty minutes of straight emojis, and we knew what we were saying."

So it was only logical for him to ask, "Why not start getting emoji tattoos? The first two are on my shoulder: I got the orange mad face and the purple devil face. I've probably got twenty to twentyfive now." (See the illustration above for a very rough map of them.) If tattoos are the NBA's Talmud—a supplementary text that enriches our understanding of the thing itselfthen Mike Scott is our favorite rabbi. -SAM SCHUBE

 ${\bf ZACH\ BARON\ } is\ {\bf GQ'} s\ staff\ writer.$



• Artis Gilmore isn't the only dominant big man in the Basketball Hall of Fame, but he's definitely the only one whose fur coat is enshrined there as well. And with good reason. Gilmore was seven feet two, which is to say: That's a whole lotta beaver.

Why is fur crucial to the NBA-style DNA? Pulling

off a fur coat is one of the most difficult style moves in the menswear canon. Too slick and you look like a generic extra ("Pimp #2") in a blaxploitation film. Too rugged and you look like Chewbacca. In fact, both Curtis Mayfield and George Lucas would probably advise you to leave the damn thing at home. But NBA players possess both the physique and the swagger to make it work. The vague femininity of fur coats doesn't rattle six-foot-ten superstars. And no matter how big a risk you're taking, great style is about doing it without fear.— MARK ANTHONY GREEN



Walt Frazier + 1974



Magic Johnson + 1988



+ circa 1980



Allen Iverson + 2002

Headbands

Half the style statements in the NBA occur above the eyes and below the scalp. Two classics: a pickpocket guard from the 1970s and a modern-day scoring champ whose headband game is the only thing working for him right now.

THEN: SLICK WATTS'S TILT

The ex-Seattle SuperSonics guard explains his signature lopsided look.



Why headbands?

I caught myself feeling like I was getting out of a swimming pool on every

play—sweat was everywhere, all down my eyes, I couldn't see sometimes. So I did the most stupidest thing any human being could do: I put white tape round my head. And I'll tell you something: You don't want to put no white tape round your scalp!

And why lopsided?

I would wear it straight and I'd shoot better—but when I crooked it, for some reason, it made my shot pull to the right, or whatever way I was wearing it. So when I was going strong to my left, I would kind of cock it [to the right], and I felt more balanced on my shot. It's pretty superstitious, but that's why.—SAM SCHUBE

NOW: MELO'S CANDY COLOR



Ask anyone at GQ HQ: I do not like Carmelo Anthony. To me, the Melo Era of Knicks basketball is the perfect sequel

to the Isiah Era: another bungled mess we all saw coming. But there is one thing I've always loved about Melo, going back to his days in Denver and at Syracuse: the way his neon headbands always match his uniforms. He looks electric out there. Then he uses it to trick people into offering him max contracts.—DEVIN GORDON



a.k.a. *Giannis Antetokounmpo*. Oh, and Giannis is pronounced "*yahn*-is." And that last name is pronounced... Hmm, let's just throw it to him here.

Antetokounmpo?
It's not that hard! Okay, you just try to put a *D* letter in the *N-T*. And try to put a *B* letter in the *M-P*. So it's AHN-DET-OH-KOUN-BO."

For more of the skyhook-dunking, sevenfoot-three-wingspan-having Bucks swingman sensation, turn to page 114.



Andre Drummond
(b)

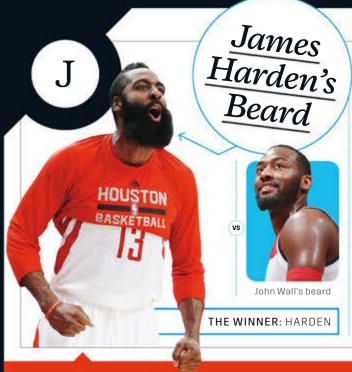
DeAndre Jordan

Dwyane Wade

(d) Serge Ibaka

(e)

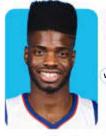
Russell Westbrook



The Houston Rockets' MVP candidate has a beautiful thick. meshy beard, and it's so central to his identity that he has said he won't retire it until he retires. But very quietly, Washington Wizards point guard John Wall is mounting a challenge to Harden's beard hegemony. He's got a ways to go, but soon this'll need to be solved on the court.

ACCORDING 66 I have the best beard in the NBA. I've got a real lumber jack thing going on, coming from Portland [Oregon] and all. I'm not Paul Bunyan—more like an RRL lumberjack."- KEVIN LOVE

HIGH TOP



Nerlens Noel's



Iman Shumpert's

THE WINNER: SHUMP

MOP TOP



Ricky Rubio's



THE WINNER: PISTOL PETE

THE 2015 NBA HAIRSTYLE REPORT



Bebe's Untamable Mane

• When the young Brazilian was drafted in 2013, his cap hung on for dear life. The Raptors reserve is seven feet without the haireight feet five with it.



Mike Miller's Wave

• In fifteen seasons, Miller has had just about every cut in the book. Now in Cleveland, he's trying out a waxed-up new-wave pompadour. His buddy Timberlake is proud.



Elfrid's Best Basquiat

• It's tough to really classify Magic rookie Elfrid Payton's hair: It's a 'fro, but it's also dreaded and also unkempt. Whatever you call it, it's pretty badass.

Kareem



Kareem converted to Islam at UCLA and changed his name the day after he won his first NBA title, in 1971.

It's the ballad of the NBA big man: "When you have to have everything custom-made," says Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, "you don't have the luxury of experimenting too much." Above a certain height-seven feet, saystyle tends to get overwhelmed by necessity. So Kareem kept it simple, effortlessly projecting a vibe of World's Tallest Wise Man. We asked the Lakers great how fashion figured into the game during his day and what he thinks of its ascendance now.—s.s.

How would you describe your style during your playing days?

Very casual. My height made me stand out enough, so I didn't want to attract more attention to myself by dressing flambovantly. However, I did try to emulate the casual chic of my favorite musician, Miles Davis. With my budget, most of my style experiments were in various combinations of facial hair.

Any favorite clothes from that time?

I wore custom jeans and polo shirts. Very preppy. I looked like a giant golf caddie or a pool attendant.

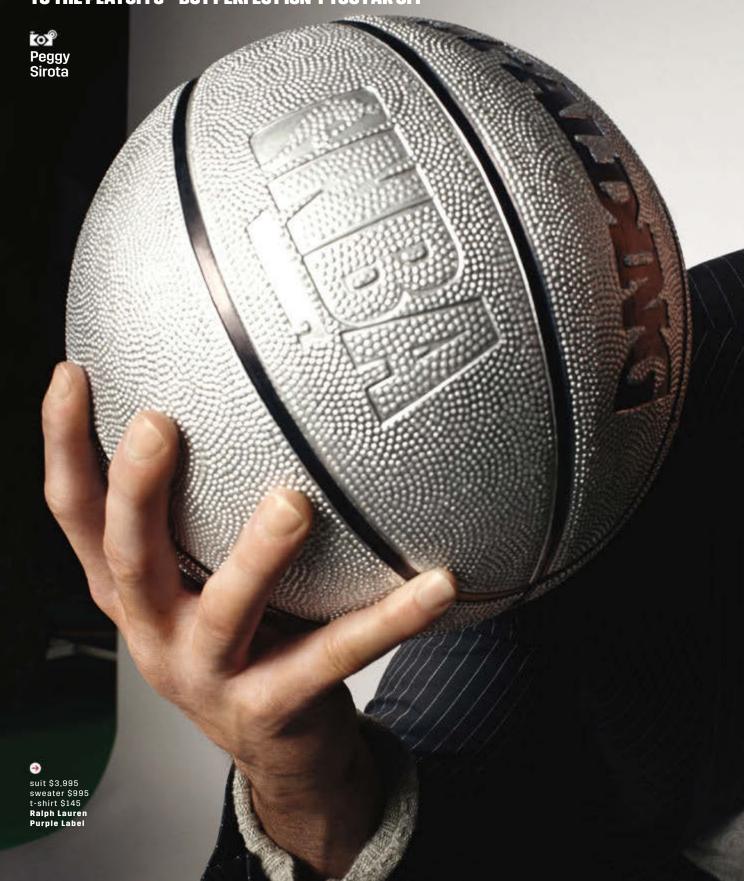
Did you put much thought into it?

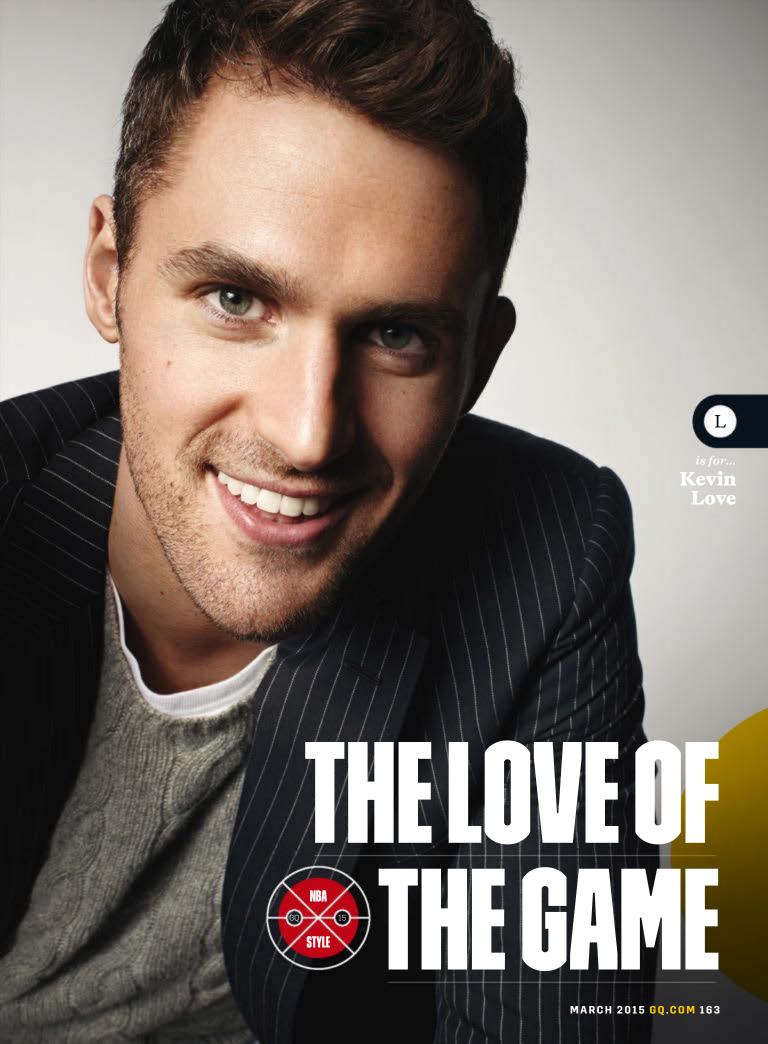
I put just enough thought into it so I didn't look like a slob. All I knew was that I didn't want to look like Wilt Chamberlain, who mostly wore flip-flops, tank tops, and sweatpants. He looked like a guy about to ask for directions to the soup kitchen.

What do you think of the league's sense of style today?

The style today is generally much more aggressive, because it includes not just clothing but hairstyles and tattoos. There are two reasons for that. First, many of the players are young men anxious to impress women. Second, this is the Age of the Endorsement. There are a lot of great players, so the competition to attract top endorsements is even more intense than the competition on the court. Sometimes an outrageous style can give the player an edge.

HE'S DATING HOLLYWOOD ROYALTY. HE'S CATCHING PASSES FROM THE BEST BASKETBALL PLAYER ON EARTH. HE'S HANDSOME, STYLISH, AND RICH—AND HE'S ONLY 26 YEARS OLD. LIFE ISN'T QUITE PERFECT FOR MENTING LOVE—THE CAVE BIG MAN IS STILL CHASING HIS FIRST TITLE; HECK, HE'S STILL CHASING HIS FIRST TRIP TO THE PLAYOFFS—BUT PERFECT ISN'T TOO FAR OFF





THE GUY'S LAST NAME

is Love. Like the name of a man who steals girlfriends by saving kittens from fires while being shirtless. When you first meet him, that name seems almost ironic—the way people call a fat guy "Slim." Kevin Love didn't own his first pair of jeans until he was 17. "I was very doughy," says the Portland, Oregon, native. "I wore whatever shoes I could find in my size. High school was an awkward stage for me."

You almost kind of believe Kevin, sitting eye to eye with him. He is still pretty Middle-Earthy. He doesn't look doughy, but he definitely looks unfamously approachable. Maybe even a little dorky. During his second season in the NBA, he wore adult braces that he hid like a shy kid (which he was), instead of just owning it like a young millionaire (which he also was). Even his endorsement deals suggest little preoccupation with seeming cool. He gloats about the time he visited Taco Bell headquarters and dazzled employees with his knowledge of a long-discontinued regional menu item called Mexi-Nuggets. As for his sneaker deal, the crown jewel of cool for NBA players, he's signed by a Chinese company called 361 Degrees. The shoes, kindly put, look more like children's doodles of sneakers. Children who will not one day major in sneaker designing. You consider all this and the name Kevin Love sounds aptly funny. A little ironic, perfec for pre-pubescent locker-room jokes. Like, say, Marty Funkhouser.

But then Kevin Love stands up and something changes. He's six ten and walks with that well-rehearsed swagger that all ballplayers have. You see a dozen women swoon as he moves past and you remember: Oh yeah, this guy looks like a Calvin Klein model.

Then you watch him very easily drop twenty-five points and grab fifteen rebounds and you remember why LeBron James personally picked Love to join him in Cleveland this season. When you read about him and the bombshell actress he's dating, Cody Horn (Channing Tatum's girlfriend in *Magic Mike*), you start to think completely differently about the name Kevin Love. It's a name that's less ironic and more badass. Like John Shaft.

When we spoke, the Cavaliers were under some intense scrutiny. The reclamation project was taking





is for... Medical-Device Style

Last season, it was Derrick Rose's black therapeutic neck strips. This season, it's James Harden's ring-shaped shoulder patch. NBA players are always aching, but they have a proud history of figuring out how to make soldiering on look slick. -DEVIN GORDON



(a) George Mikan's alasses

1950s-era Lakers big man, Clark Kent of the low post. Proto-nerdcore.



(b) Robert Parish's areen kneenads

The hulking gear paired nicely with the Chief's perma-scowl.



(c) Michael Jordan's compression shorts

And then, for the next five years, every twerp at the YMCA had them.



(d) Rip Hamilton's face mask

So menacing he kept wearing it even after his broken nose healed.



(e) Allen Iverson's elbow sleeve

When you launch that many thirty-footers, your elbow gets sore, yo.



With more style-biters every day, how does an NBA veteran stand out? Dwyane Wade's stylist, Calyann Barnett, has the answer.



Q How does a grown-ass man make overalls look this cool?

A Overalls are such a statement that the key is to pair them with a crisp, clean button-up. Wearing them off the shoulders keeps them young. But most important, you have to wear them with Dwyane's level of confidence.



is for... **Nick** Young

We're big fans of how Lakers wing Nick Young dresses. You know who else is a big fan of how Nick Young dresses? Nick Young. We talked with Swaggy P about how he could help the sartorially helpless and where he rates among the NBA's style icons. — MARK ANTHONY GREEN

HAIR

"My hair is a signature in itself. You see players all the time now with my haircut. You know where they got it from. It's taken on its own life."

SNEAKERS

"I might pop out some really rare Jordans or Nikes to play in. I don't know how people wait and wait to wear their rare kicks. For me it's like the first day of school. liust have to wear them, no matter how much they're worth."

RIVALS

"I'm most definitely in the top three most stylish Lakers of all time. And top ten of all players."

CHARITY

"If Tim Duncan [see opposite page] would let me dress him for a week, I'd put him in a slim Tom Ford suit, get rid of those big flannel shirts he wears. And then I'd throw him a Versace shirt. He tries, but he's just so vintage with it."





Paisley



• We hate to kick a man while he's down-seriously, can't wait to have you back, PG!—but we're a little terrified of what Paul George might wear next. Most flagrant offense: this paisley shirt, which we're assuming he picked up at an Ann Taylor Loft. We've got our eyes on you, Paul. Don't make us get ugly.

is for... Quicken Loans Arena

The NBA—so hip in so many other ways—has a few of the dopiest arena names in all of sports. Can you match the worst with the teams forced to call them home?

- 1. Sleep Train Arena
- 2. Smoothie King Center
- 3. Quicken Loans Arena
- 4. Talking Stick Resort Arena
- A. New Orleans **Pelicans**
- B. Phoenix Suns
- C. Sacramento Kings
- D. Cleveland Cavaliers

(I) C (S) A (S) D (4) B

THE LOVE GURU (SEMI-) DEFENDS HIS HOME COURT

Quicken Loans is bad, but it's not the worst. Sleep Train Arena is definitely number one. Smoothie King is a close second. It only costs 5 million bucks or so a year to name the arena.... Maybe it should cost more?"_KEVIN LOVE

R

The Runway Shot

· A DECADE AGO, IF you wanted to know what kind of clothes vour favorite NBA superstar was flashing off the court, you had to camp outside by the players-only parking lot (or outside the Gold Club in Atlanta). Now all you have to do is flip on ESPN or TNT a few minutes before tip-off to catch what we call the Runway Shot: the three- or four-second shot where the camera tracks a star player's entrance, transforming the gray bowels of some anonymous arena (is that American Airlines Center or **AmericanAirlines** Arena?) into a catwalk rivaling Milan during Fashion Week. All the players know this shot is coming when they arrive, and nearly all of them dress for it. There's already an unwritten set of best practices. (1) For a successful strut, do not acknowledge the camera-ever. The whole point is for the fans at home to get a look at your look. (2) Carry a tiny man bag of indeterminate purpose. Is that a shaving kit? A cigar case? LeBron will never tell. What we love most about the Runway Shot is the way it can intermingle vanity (I make \$23 million, and I'm wearing all of it!) with a dose of humanity (I'm about to play in Game 7 and I'm scared shitless!). It's everything we love about today's NBA: drama, stardom, and

silver lamé sweatshirts.

-SAM SCHUBE



For sixteen seasons, **Rasheed Wallace** was the Omar Little of the NBA: the philosopher-king of street ball. A man with a code.

Philly born and bred, Wallace was smart, cynical, and capitalist to his core. He had a big smile and a frightening glare, and we loved him. Here's seven more reasons why.—LANG WHITAKER

- + Had WWE-style championship belts made for all his 2004 title-winning Detroit Pistons teammates.
- + Once told a reporter he collected all his fingernail clippings in a jar. (He later confessed he was joking.)
- + Took the phrase "Ball don't lie" mainstream. He'd vell it when he was

- whistled for a foul and when his opponent missed the next shot.
- + 'Sheed on money:
 "I don't give a fuck
 about no trade rumors.
 As long as somebody
 CTC, at the end of the
 day I'm with them. For
 all you that don't know
 what CTC means,
 that's 'cut the check.'"
- + 'Sheed on referees, part 1: "Some of them cats are felonious, man."

- + 'Sheed on visiting the White House after the Pistons' 2004 title:
- "I ain't going to say shit to [George W.Bush]. I didn't vote for him. I'm not excited at all. It's just part of the thing."
- + 'Sheed on referees, part 2: "Haters everywhere. Hate, hate, hate, hate, hate, hate. Everywhere. Hate, hate, hate."



Classic 'Sheed style: repping Philly with a giant Flyers jersey, his self-commissioned 2004 title belt in tow.



KOBE BRYANT

DWYANE WADE



ROY HIBBERT



• Tim Duncan wouldn't be caught dead in Dwyane Wade's capris or a Russell Westbrook printed shirt. But he definitely has a style, and it's representative of his Caribbean roots. Let's call it "island comfortable." And he probably spends a helluva lot less money on his wardrobe than his pickier contemporaries.—TOM ZILLER

Uniforms

· LeBron's back in Cleveland, but at least as we were putting this issue to bed, nothing was working out as planned. People have been blaming injuries, shoddy defense, the rookie coach... I say: Nobody—not even the best player on the planet—is going to win an NBA title dressed in these thrift-shop juniorvarsity uniforms. Nobody looks good in mustard. It's time for new Cavs uniforms, and it's

scratch, seeing as how there's no vintage "glory days" era for them to draw on and nothing good enough in the present worth tweaking-despite several options in the Cavs' current uniform rotation. (And while we're at it, what the hell is a Cavalier, anyway, and what's it got to do with Cleveland? A cavalier attitude? A small spaniel with silky hair? A supporter of King Charles I in

time to start from



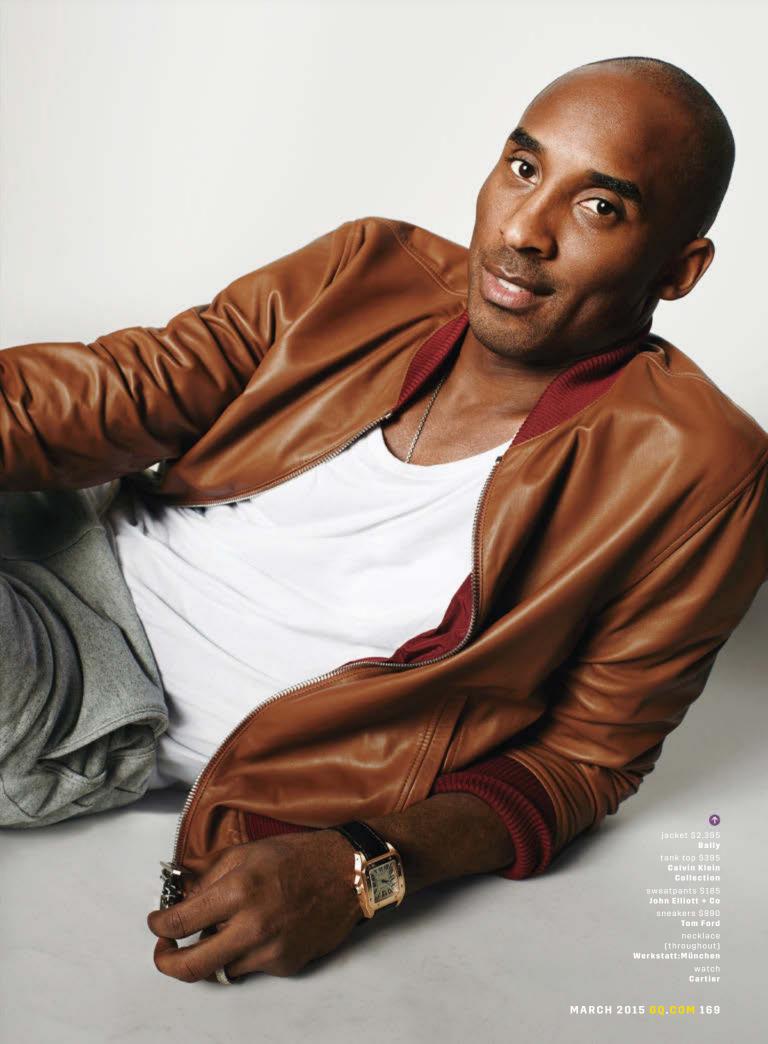
the English Civil War?) Maybe Commissioner Silver can broker a deal whereby Sacramento sends Cleveland their Kings mascot, along with some cash and a couple of future draft picks.
Then we'll have something to build on.

-FRED WOODWARD



HIMSELF "THE VALENTINO OF THE NBA" HAS BEEN RUNNING HIS MOUTH LIKE NEVER BEFORE. THIS INTERVIEW—THE LAST ONE HE GAVE BEFORE HIS SEASON-ENDING INJURY IN LATE JANUARY—WAS NO EXCEPTION

BY CHUCK KLOSTERMAN





"I KNOW WHO I AM" IS

among the first things Kobe Bryant tells me, which is the kind of statement made only by people who are very, very right or very, very wrong. He tells me this in a breakfast café called Haute Cakes, tucked inside a strip mall in Newport Beach, California. We're fifteen minutes from his house, but I nonetheless mention that this is not the kind of place I expected to meet him. "What did you expect," he asks. "A dungeon?"

It's the first Monday of January. Last night, Bry<mark>ant hit a floater w</mark>ith twelve seconds on the clock to beat the Indiana Pacers; tonight his team is in Portland, but he's not traveling, in order to rest his aging bones. Two days from today, he'll go two of twelve against the Clippers as the Lakers fall 18½ games out of first place in the Western Conference. Unless the unthinkable transpires, this will be the worst season of his nineteen-year career. I mentally prepare myself for a justifiably surly, potentially uncommunicative sociopath.

My assumptions are wrong.

He walks through the door at 8:40 A.M. Bryant, who has already been awake for three hours, is a few minutes late for our meeting. (Broadcaster Stuart Scott had died the day before, so Bryant needed to provide a eulogistic response for ESPN Radio.) He sits with his back to the wall, wholly expressionless. My first question is unrelated to sports: At the behest of GQ, I'm supposed to get Bryant's feelings on the attention that rivals like Russell Westbrook and Dwvane Wade receive for their fashion choices. Mildly amused, he notes that he now tries to be "less fashion-forward" (he's wearing camouflage pants as he says this) and that if he dressed like Westbrook ("skinny pedal pushers and low-cut sneakers with a polka-dotted shirt, with glasses and a backpack"), it would be received as a practical joke. This spills into a banal discussion about branding, which is not a subject I want to talk about. Knowing that Bryant has to leave the café by ten o'clock, I decide to take a calculated risk: I tell him that there is no point in pretending we're about to have a normal conversation, because nothing about this meeting is remotely normal. I just want to directly ask him all the things I've always wondered about his life. And from the moment I say this, I can tell that this is what he wants, too.



LET'S START IN the middle: Bryant won five titles with Phil Jackson as his coach and three with Shaquille O'Neal as his teammate. Despite that success, both relationships are largely defined by their complexity. It is widely assumed Shaq and Bryant are not friends, particularly after a 2008 incident in a New York nightclub when O'Neal performed an impromptu

freestyle rap requesting that Kobe describe the flavor of his anus. Bryant's trajectory with Jackson has been more nuanced, but deeper and (at times) more painful. Though Jackson has said he views Bryant "like my son," he's also written damaging things about Kobe in multiple books, once classifying him as "uncoachable" and expressing a curious lack of surprise when Bryant was accused of rape in 2003.

Why do you think Jackson would write such negative things about you? Was he trying to psychologically motivate you, or is he just kind of a weird, arrogant person? Well, most successful people are a little arrogant.... I was very stubborn. I was like a wild horse that had the potential to become me and Shaq. So he would take shots at me in the press, and I understood he was doing

Secretariat but who was just too fucking wild. So part of that was him trying to tame me. He's very intelligent, and he understood the dynamic he had to deal with between that in order to ingratiate himself to Shaq. And since I knew what he was doing, I felt like that was an insult to my intelligence. Why not just come to me and tell me that? Another thing was that I would go to him in confidence and talk about certain things, and he would then use those things to manipulate the media against me. And from that standpoint, I finally said, "No way. I'm not gonna deal with that anymore." This was during our first run, during those first three championships. So when he'd come out in the press and say those things about me, I was finally like, "Fuck it. I'm done with this guy. I'll play for him and win championships, but I will have no interaction with him." Yet at the same time, it drove me at a maniacal pace. Because either consciously or unconsciously, he put a tremendous amount of pressure on me to be efficient, and to be great, and to be great now.

When this was happening, did you actively dislike him?

Yeah. [pause] Yeah. I was like, "Fuck him. I'm out here busting my ass. I'm killing myself." And it became insulting. Because I chose to extend my deal with the Lakers to play with Shaquille O'Neal and win championships. I knew what I could have done individually. I could have gone to another team and averaged thirty-five points a game. I could have gone anywhere and destroyed people. I gave that up to win championships. So it was infuriating to hear people say I was selfish. It was very, very maddening.

Do you feel like Shaq was publicly rewarded for not working hard? Somehow the fact that he was a little lazy always came across as charming.

Well, he was [charming]. The perception of him was exactly that. Now it's not. The city of L.A. knows me now, and they know who I am. But at the time, the perception was that Kobe was trying to break up the team. That was wrong. I am a maniacal worker, and if you're not working as hard as I am, I am going to let you know about it. That's why Shaq and I still have a good relationship: He knows I have zero fear of him. I would tell him what he was doing and what he wasn't doing. And vice versa. There were times when we absolutely could not stand each other. We could not be in the same room together. But we challenged the shit out of each other.

So would you say the perception of him being lazy was inaccurate?

He had years when he was lazy. But during those three championships we won? To say he was a beast would be an understatement. To say I didn't learn things from him that I still use to this day would be a disservice. To be fair, I think what happened is that, as you get older, your body starts breaking down, and you have to really love the process in order to get through that. Like, right now, I hurt. My ankle joints, my knee joints. My back. My thighs are sore. But for him, with his big toe and his knee, it became very hard for him to get up in the morning and push through those things. He might not have been as willing to do those things at the time, and I wasn't thrilled about that.



THE IMAGE OF BRYANT being less than "thrilled" with the not-so-maniacal work ethic of a teammate has become the center of his persona. Though he will never usurp the greatness of Michael Jordan in the public consciousness, he has likely already surpassed MJ in terms of the terror and antipathy he instills in those who play alongside him. His legacy is littered with the corpses of slackers who could not match his commitment, particularly underachievers of unusual size (Dwight Howard, Andrew Bynum). It has become popular to theorize that his ego-and his two-year, \$48.5 million contract—are now actively hurting the franchise. The perception has become so universal that ESPN The Magazine published a story suggesting the Lakers cannot sign topflight free agents as long as Bryant controls the system. Most of the story's sources were anonymous, and Bryant claims he hasn't read the article. But he also says he has been asked about it enough to "grasp what it was conceptually," and he certainly doesn't dispute the takeaway.

"Does my nature make me less enjoyable to play with? Of course," he says. "Is it possible that some top players in the league are intimidated by that? Yes. But do I want to play with those players? Does the Laker organization want those specific players? No. Magic. Jordan. Bird. We all would have been phenomenal teammates. This organization wants players who will carry this

DON'T BENCH THE BIG GUNS Splurged on a

Splurged on a killer trench or topcoat? Good. Now put it in the starting rotation and keep it there. It'll elevate your beer-run clothes just as much as it does your suits.

+

trench coat \$3,995 sweatpants \$1,695 Ralph Lauren Purple Label hoodie \$198 John Elliott + Co sneakers \$90 Nike

where to buy it? go to gq.com/go /fashiondirectories



franchise to another five or six championships. And if they're not cut from that cloth, they don't belong here."

This self-perpetuating image of Bryant as a relentless workaholic has become so integral to his ethos that it informs every other detail about his life. He has become The Last Hard Man, the realest of the real, the solitary remnant from a Precambrian NBA era when players still hated one another and the only people who cared about AAU basketball were actual eighth graders. Yet people forget that this was not always the case. As crazy as it now seems, there was a long stretch in the '90s when the principal knock on Bryant was his alleged insincerity. He smiled constantly, spoke Italian, and took Brandy to the prom. He adopted a vanilla persona modeled after Julius Erving, despite a transparent aspiration to embody the most conventional definition of urban cool; it often came across like Grant Hill trying to impersonate Allen Iverson.

"It wasn't that people thought I was *soft*," he says, slightly wincing at the implications of the word. "It was more of a street-credibility thing: 'He grew up in Italy. He's not one of us.' But what I came to understand, coming out of Colorado, is that I had to be me, in the place where I was at that moment."

Which brings us to the hinge point in the career of Kobe Bryant: the week he checked into a Colorado hotel room, had sex with a woman who worked there, and was subsequently arrested on a sexual-assault charge. A year later, the charges were dropped and Bryant apologized. But the incident will (obviously) never go away. When Bryant dies, the accusation will probably appear in the second paragraph of his obituary. And he knows this.

"I started to consider the mortality of what I was doing," he says. At the time, he was 24. "What's important? What's not important? What does it mean when everybody loves you, and then everybody hates your guts for something they *think* you did? So that's when I decided that—if people were going to like me or not like me-it was going to be for who I actually was. To hell with all that plain-vanilla shit, just to get endorsement deals. Those are superficial, anyway. I don't enjoy doing them. I'll just show people who I actually am.... The endorsements were really the least of my concerns. Was I afraid of going to jail? Yes. It was twenty-five to life, man. I was terrified. The one thing that really helped me during that process—I'm Catholic, I grew up Catholic, my kids are Catholic—was talking to a priest. It was actually kind of funny: He looks at me and says, 'Did you do it?' And I say, 'Of course not.' Then he asks, 'Do you have a good lawyer?' And I'm like, 'Uh, yeah, he's phenomenal.' So then he just said, 'Let it go. Move on. God's not going to give you anything you can't handle, and it's in his hands now. This is something you can't control. So let it go.' And that was the turning point."

THE REASON BRYANT NEEDS to leave at 10 A.M. is because he's working on a documentary for Showtime titled Kobe Bryant's *Muse.* He seems exceedingly interested in filmmaking at the moment, so I ask if he's seen Whiplash. "Of course," he replies. Whiplash is about a psychotic music instructor (J. K. Simmons) who physically abuses and emotionally manipulates a selfdriven jazz drummer (Miles Teller) until the teenage musician both collapses and succeeds. Thematically, the film suggests an idea that has been mostly erased from modern popular culture: the possibility that inhumane, unacceptable treatment is sometimes essential to the creation of genius. I ask Bryant what he thought of Whiplash. "That's me," he says, although I can't tell if he means the Simmons character or the Teller character. He might mean the entire movie. In any case, he's acutely aware of the draconian strangeness of his own personality and of the downside to his ambitions, two characteristics he views almost interchangeably.

Do you ever think that the qualities that make you great are actually problems?

Oh yeah. But the things that make a person average are also problems. The things that make someone not good at anything at all are a problem. If you want to be the greatest of all time at something, there's going to be a negative side to that. If you want to be a high school principal, that's fine, too—but that will also carry negative baggage.

So how much are you willing to give up? Have you given up the possibility of having friends? Do you have any friends?

I have "like minds." You know, I've been fortunate to play in Los Angeles, where there are a lot of people like me. Actors. Musicians. Businessmen. Obsessives. People who feel like God put them on earth to do whatever it is that they do. Now, do we have time to build great relationships? Do we have time to build great friendships? No. Do we have time to socialize and to hang out aimlessly? No. Do we want to do that? No. We want to work. I enjoy working.

So is this a choice? Are you actively choosing not to have friends?

Well, yes and no. I have friends. But being a "great friend" is something I will never be. I can be a *good* friend. But not a *great* friend. A great friend will call you every day and remember your birthday. I'll get so wrapped up in my shit, I'll never remember that stuff. And the people who are my friends understand this, and they're usually the same way. You gravitate toward people who are like you. But the kind of relationships you see in movies—that's impossible for me. I have good relationships with players around the league. LeBron and I will text every now and then. KG and I will text every now and then. But in terms (continued on page 211)



In 2009, **Steph Curry** blogged about his rookie season for GQ.com. This year we called him back to play a game of Then vs. Now.—DANIEL RILEY

Then: Mom
makes pre-game
pasta.
Now: Wife makes
pre-game pasta
(+ chicken).
Then: Apartment
in coach's
skyscraper.
Now: House with a
pool (+ kid).

Then: Mercedes
G-Wagen.
Now: Porsche
Panamera.
Then: Got carded
at the bar at CPK.
Now: "Depends on
my facial hair, but
I still get carded
at restaurants and
even movies."







• Amar'e Stoudemire—the world's tallest, nimblest sorta-Jew—did a mitzvah for all the Chosen People by rocking Hebrew hats as a style move. Thanks, STAT!

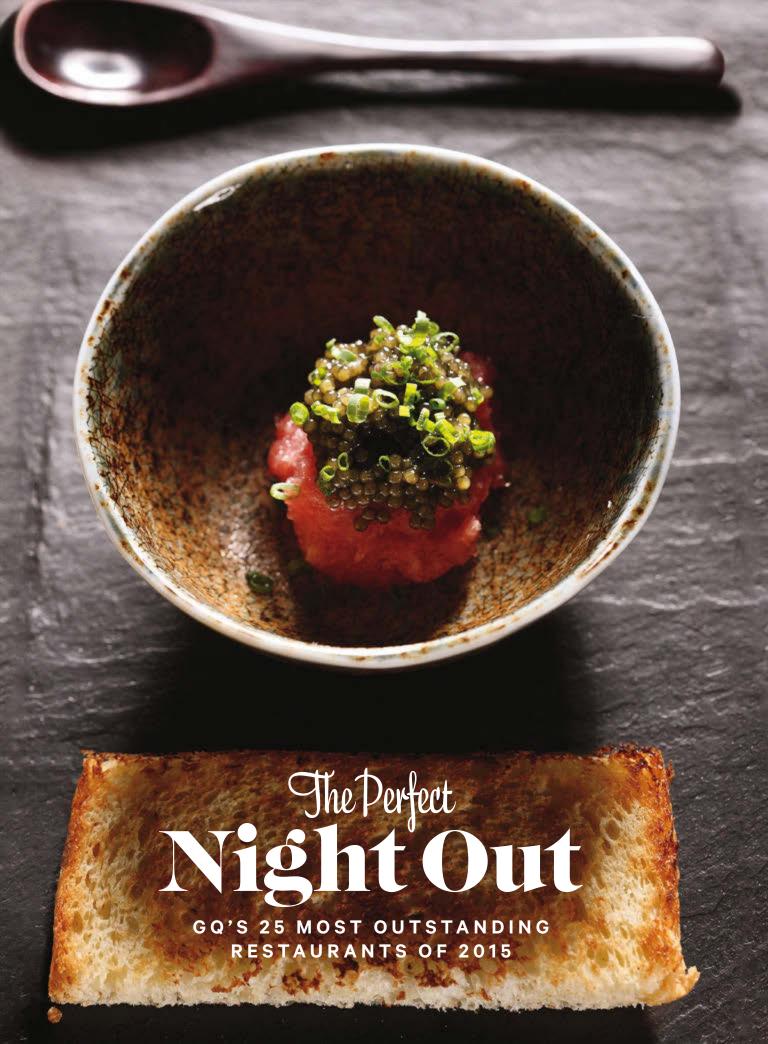


THE LOVE GURU GETS THE LAST WORD

I'm from Oregon zero, O. Plus, zero kind of plays off my last name. It's like 'No Love,' ya know? I still feel like I have a lot to prove."— KEVIN LOVE









That's right, we're going bigger and better, more than doubling our annual list of the best new places to stuff your face right this moment. Why? Because the rate at which boundary-vaulting chefs are launching paradigm-busting restaurants (and chef-led Thai joints and reformed sushi-Nazi counters and trattorias full of magic tricks) in the past year has grown even faster than our waistlines. And because these days going out to eat is synonymous with going out, period. Here's our game plan for twenty-five nights. The other 340 are up to you ALAN RICHMAN

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↑ Rose's Luxury
From left, chef-owner
Aaron Silverman; beef
crudo that looks like
an edible painting; cacio
e pepe, a.k.a. simple
pasta, perfected; Rose's
welcoming committee.

1.

Rose's Luxury washington, d.c.

EVERYTHING YOU LOVE TO EAT, JUST BETTER

I stood stoically in line for an hour and forty minutes as the rains came, the wind blew, the night fell. At Rose's Luxury, reservations aren't taken, waits are interminable, and suffering is standard. You won't mind. It's everything inside I didn't expect from standing outside, much like one of those tiny churches in Venice where all the grandeur is within.

The narrow white-painted brick exterior hid comfortable bare-wood tables, patient waiters. and such culinary wonders as the greatest and probably most massive veal parmigiana ever made, crunchy under a slathering of red sauce and cheese. It's official: Rose's has wrested the veal parm championship from New York's Carbone. From the tiny wine list, I drank the greatest Muscadet of my life. (Don't ask. It's gone.) Beef crudo was like no other, a beaming red beacon for carnivores. The bread was warm challah, with butter and honey, which I took as a suggestion to pray over chef Aaron Silverman's masterful food. Fair enough. The cooking is beautifully conceived, playfully amplified, the essence of what modern, casual dining should be.

Langbaan PORTLAND, OR

A TWO-HOUR THAI VACATION IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST





I've rarely felt so at home on a visit to a restaurant where I sat at a counter in front of two chefs I could barely understand. Langbaan—the name is Thai for "back of the house"-offers a tasting menu in the rear of a larger restaurant, access obtained by yanking on the handle of a meat-grinding machine attached to a supposedly secret door. Such

shenanigans usually lead to pretentiousness, but not here.

Langbaan is welcoming and generous, the food homey and gentle. Only the recipes are complicated, like the handwoven egg net enclosing pork, peanuts, and much more. (There's always much more with Thai.) Live scallop sitting in a crispy cup made from coconut

milk and rice flour
was so sumptuous
I wondered if it was
intended to pass
for dessert, and the
salads contained
tuna ceviche or
marinated pork jowl—
my kind of greens.
This is the first Thai
food I've ever eaten
that made me wish
I lived over there.



→ Langbaan

From top, treats like porkjowl salad and a stuffed, hand-woven egg net; pull up a chair at the counter.

Opening pages, from left, Shuko's Japanese milk toast with toro and caviar; a table for two at Rose's Luxury.

Momofuku Ko N.Y.C.

DAVID CHANG'S LABORATORY,
PART 2: THE LEGEND REBORN

Don't make the mistake of thinking you've been here before. The name's the same, but the location is new and so is most of the food. The original Momofuku Ko was overtaken by Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare as the American champion of counter-style fine dining. Now chef David Chang (yes, the guy who writes for GQ) is battling back. After ten small dishes, I thought I had the place figured out: The new Ko was Chang's take on Japanese, with dishes such as madai tartare with chile, shiso, and Australian finger lime.

Then I realized I was wrong. Out came scrambled eggs with potatoes and caviar. Lobster in a foamy bisque-like broth. Uni with chickpea puree, Japan meets Israel. Petits fours, classically French. The wine list is fascinating and well-priced. The meal is a little less reasonable at \$175, but you get twenty or so courses, and GQ isn't paying Chang nearly enough to finance this stunning wrapped-in-glass space. His first spot, Momofuku Noodle Bar, cost less than \$200,000. I asked him how much went into the new Ko, and he replied, grimacing, "I'm not going to tell you."









4. Fiola Mare washington, d.c

NEW HEIGHTS IN #TREATYOSELF DINING

Fabio Trabocchi has found his restaurant. He's already famous, has been for a while, but after suffering for a few years in New York, he returned to D.C. to open a few nice places. Now comes

the fabulous Fiola Mare, a grand Italian seafood restaurant that's situated on the Potomac but sings of the Riviera. It's about the kind of classic, ambitious dining rarely found anymore.



here he lets loose. His pastas are richin particular, a lobster ravioli that's mostly lobster in a ginger-butter sauce. Tuna tartare is unexpectedly juicy: a mingling of fish, tomatoes, capers, and Mever lemon, Under the Sea is a bowl of Parmesan-rindaccented dashi laden with scallops and cod sausage. Desserts are gorgeous: The dark-chocolate terrine wears candied mint leaves and pistachio dabs that resemble Hershey's Kisses. In an era when dining out can feel like work-the research, the reservations, the waiting-Fiola Mare sweeps you away and reminds you that a meal can still be magical.

R.I.P., Dessert



Why is a great last course (like that one on the left) so rare these days?

• Restaurants don't care about pastry chefs anymore. They take up space. They cost money. Now they're practically gone. The death of desserts is the top terrible trend of the year. Maybe I should say the death of good desserts. because we still get bad ones. I hate what chefs are asking us to swallow at meal's end: concoctions with gummy fruit, hacked-up cake, weird sorbet, granola. (A friend calls these "a horse's breakfast.") What demented chef thinks we should like them? Who's making them? Apprentices? Cub Scouts? They're god-awful, a sin. Do yourself a favor: Don't order them. Honor out-of-work pastry chefs by saying no. Stop for an ice cream cone on the way home. Please invite me along.—A.R.

5. Pax Americana HOUSTON

A REAL TOP CHEF, NOT A TOP CHEF™

Pax Americana is a throwback to a vanishing time when young chefs were discovered in their kitchens, not on television. You eat here for two reasons: to taste Adam Dorris's somewhat American—but distinctively personal—cooking and to see the glowing painting of Chairman Mao by Andy Warhol on the dining-room wall. (In Texas, restaurant owners can afford such eye candy.) Dorris cooks with exuberance, intelligence, and complexity: juicy local swordfish, sliced thick; creamy goat ricotta with soft, soft slices of acorn squash; eggs in a skillet with greens, Thai chiles, and scallion-kimchi aioli; beef tartare like no other—brined and smoked, chewy and dense. At a time when money-controlling partners tend to meddle in the kitchen, it's rare—and worth celebrating—when promising chefs wield so much freedom.

← Momofuku Ko

From top, Ko before the crowd arrives; lobster with sweet potato, tonburi, and of course, lobster sauce; a perfect square of sabazushi (mackerel).

5 Fiola Mare

From top, the chocolateterrine dessert with an entire flower garden as garnish; so much sun, the dining room could double as a greenhouse.







HIDDEN THAI WITH A HIGH POLISH



It calls itself an "eatery," hardly a promising descriptor. It's tucked into the far reaches of a vast hotel, ridiculously difficult to find if you enter through the lobby. Yet there are culinary powerhouses behind this seemingly obscure spot. The proprietor, Pim Techamuanvivit, says she can cook every dish on the menu just as well as her kitchen staff but has no idea

how to do so in a restaurant. So she brought on Michael Gaines-former souschef at Manresa, the legendary restaurant of David Kinch-to run the kitchen. Kin Khao is lively, crowded with happy customers who know they are getting some of the most complex and satisfying Thai food in America. All three curries I tried (green, massaman, sour) exploded from their

bowls. Chicken wings, the favorite Thai food of Americans. are marinated. cooked to order, and still crisp when they arrive enveloped in a tamarind-Sriracha glaze. There's one dessert, black-rice pudding, served with three condiments: one sweet, one salty, one crunchy. Whichever you select will tell you more about yourself than your horoscope.



7. Shuko N.Y.C.

SUSHI INNOVATED BUT NOT EXAGGERATED

The subtle world of sushi evolves in profoundly tiny ways. At Shuko, the rice is a little less obvious, the fish a little more blissful, the toppings sometimes nonexistent, sometimes sensational. Raw scallop with yuzu salt seared my mouth, making me happy in a way no sushi has before. A friend and I had maitake-mushroom tempura over rice, a short time later spicy maitake mushrooms over tempura-like crispy rice. It was Japanese food that made me grin. Shuko is mostly about Nick Kim and Jimmy Lau, partners and alumni of New York's Masa empire, which means the sushi never slips into silly, so often the case when sushi bars innovate. Here's another sushi-bar rarity: charm. When I clumsily dropped my chopsticks, my friend groused, "Your chopstick skills are not good." Kim overheard and chimed in, "Mine, neither."

8. Laurel PHILADELPHIA

BONJOUR, AND WELCOME TO ... PHILLY?

The room might well be a shotgun apartment: front door leading to a tiny area (seating twenty) leading straight back to an undersized kitchen. There's not much decor, save for a few black iron sconces and hanging lamps. The chairs are exceedingly comfy, the service attentive, the stemware pleasing—all enhancements to a BYOB dining experience with a style of cooking I loved back when it was called "modern French." Yet the most stunning dish was pure Americana, catfish in a coconut-clam broth. Hard to imagine a kitchen in Philly accomplishing what the South has been trying to do for centuries: make catfish elegant. Chef Nicholas Elmi does it

۶ Kin Khao

Three curries plus hot wings is a bit much-but only a bit.

↑ Shuko

Nothing devilish about Tasmanian sea trout sushi.

gracefully. His meat dishes are intensely flavorful, particularly duck magret and foie gras. Stylishness has come to East Passyunk Avenue, once ground zero for cheesesteaks, now fast emerging as Philly's premier dining locale.



A DISH TO FLY FOR!



Pizza of the Year

WHITE PIE

WITH GARLIC,
KALE, ROMANO,
MOZZARELLA,
AND LEMON OIL
The Lantern,
Wassaic, NY
• Vivid ingredients,
crispy crust with a
pillowy rim, ordered
from a menu written
on a torn-open
cardboard box nailed

to the barroom wall.

↑ Alimento

Clockwise from top,
"A" marks the spot;
handmade tortellini...
that's been handrolled by this guy, chef
Zach Pollack.

져 Killen's Barbecue

From top, beef short rib—try not to drool on the page; barbecue master Ronnie Killen mans the butcher block.

→ Lusca

Clockwise from top left, a seafood feast featuring oysters, prawns, caviar, and a head-on aji; Lusca's spirit animal watches over the bar; Florida pumpkin swordfish takes on an orange tint from the krill and shrimp it eats.





9. Alimento L.A.

SOMEHOW, ITALIAN GETS

Chef Zach Pollack has turned Italian food inside out. His take on tortellini en brodo—in Italy, that's ring-shaped pasta in soup—actually puts the soup inside the pasta. (Particularly appealing to Shanghai-soup-dumpling lovers like me.) And that's just the start of the innovations at this tiny spot in the Silver Lake section of L.A. Pollack does a version of vitello tonnato with yeal tonque instead of loin; cubes of escolar with eggplant puree, almonds, and toasted breadcrumbs; escarole that could pass for a vegetable terrine; and a triumphant yellowtail collar, with his version lightly smoked, then grilled, and finally glazed in a sweet-and-sour sauce. The vividness of his flavors is very Italian, as is the simplicity of the space: small tables, globe lights. There's one very telling old-Italian touch: The restaurant manager and the sous-chef live together on the second floor, directly above the joint.

Killen's Barbecue

PEARLAND (HOUSTON), TX

FREE BEER. HEAVENLY RIBS. ANY QUESTIONS?

I couldn't decide: Was Ronnie Killen's plate rib merely the single greatest piece of barbecue of my entire life, or was it the most magnificent piece of beef ever cooked at any time in history? The plate rib is the Mona Lisa of meat, resembling an abnormally thick slab of prime rib attached to a bone the size and shape of a broadsword. The meat tasted something like slowcooked brisket, the fat within deliriously caramelized. Don't confuse this massive mound of meat with the more mortal but quite tasty chuck rib, served on a combo plate with two sides. (Pork-laced pinto beans and crunchy creamed corn are the undeniable choices.)

I used to worry that Texas barbecue was





meat on soft white bread and top with coleslaw. And come early, before the place opens, when the beer is free.







11. Lusca ATLANTA

miss the bone-on

pork belly-pile the

A NEW SEA(FOOD) MONSTER FROM THE SOUTH

Two huge murals depicting octopi dominate an otherwise plain room—an homage from co-chefs Angus Brown and Nhan Le to the locally beloved Octopus Bar, where they became famous. They can't shake the attachment: The name Lusca refers to an imaginary octopuslike Caribbean sea monster. Fortunately, the whimsy doesn't carry over to the stunningly sophisticated cooking. Try the massive tortellini en brodo, and consider that this might be the year of tortellini. (See Alimento, above.) Stuffed with finely ground charcuterie trimmings and served in a reduced chicken broth, they're so rich you might wonder if you can handle more than one. Then order the pumpkin swordfish and the hand-torn potatoes—spuds are baked in a salt crust, cooled, dried, shredded, deepfried, and topped with Parmesan and parsley. They deserve a wall painting of their own.





Vegetarian Dish of the Year

MOMOTARO TARTARE Momotaro, Chicago

• The culinary alchemist's dream of making vegetables taste like meat comes true. Momotaro, a Japanese tomato, is dehydrated. then rehydrated. Shiso and spices are added. Magically chewy; so much like chopped beef you won't believe it's not.



Above, head butcher Julia Poplawsky gets to work. Right, one big beef rib.

^a Ataula

The Xupa-Xup, otherwise known as a chorizo lollipop, allows every man to finally achieve his dream of eating salumi like candy.

⇒ smoke.oil.salt.

To the octopus that was smoked, then slowcooked. Spanish-style. in wine and beer: Thank you for your delicious, delicious sacrifice. You will not be forgotten.



Dai Due AUSTIN

CARNIVORES VERY, VERY WELCOME

Except for the name, which means "from the two" in Italian and is way too deep for me, Dai Due is easy to understand: You walk in you're facing a butcher cou<mark>nter</mark>, you wisely order meat. The pork rib chop, routinely commercial elsewhere, comes out nearly black, deeply porky, and as satisfying as a beefsteak. The six-ounce

sirloin tip, reserved for

women on Tuesdays (a.k.a. ladies' steak night) is everything a thrifty fellow could want-treat your gal to a steak dinner for ten bucks. Much credit belongs to the woodfired grill, where local oak sends out tendrils of smoke that envelop everything, including the cooks. The wine is all Texas, a potential problem—but not the

tasty Aglianico from Duchman Winery in Driftwood. The best starter is the cold-meat board, which isn't standard Italian-style cold cuts but all manner of country and Germanic provisions, including bierwurst, pork-jowl terrine, and sprouted rye. Never forget that it was German butchers who culinarily settled the American West.



13. Ataula portland, or

SMALL PLATES THAT HAVE BIG AMBITIONS

Ataula calls itself a tapas bar, but don't expect standard small bites. Chef Jose Chesa's dishes are inventive, skilled, and gorgeously composed, starting with his chorizo lollipop. Rossejat is something like paella but made with tiny toasted noodles instead of rice, and his Catalan-custard-filled mini-xuixos taste uncannily like Cronuts.



14. smoke.oil.salt. L.A.

TODAY'S SPECIAL: AN EXTRA HELPING OF MACHISMO

The food is sort of Spanish, but I've never come upon a Spanish chef who cooked with the intensity of Perfecto Rocher. Grilled spring onions with romesco-like sauce. Smoked, grilled octopus over vinegary potatoes. And chocolatecaramel rice pudding that's deep and devastating. The space conjures up a different name: loud.dark.cramped. But the food is certainly something else: savory.original.startling.



COASTAL ITALIAN WITH A BIT OF A BUZZ

Carbone is satirical. Dirty French is retro. Santina, the newest restaurant from Major Food Group, led by Mario Carbone and Rich Torrisi, is giddy. Its extravagant chandeliers, bouncy music, exquisite cocktails, and multi-hued cannoli take you to an Italian island where the party never stops. The wines are irresistibly priced, the blue crab is artfully entwined with pasta, and the chickpea pancakes are the bar food of the century.

16. Spice to Table

ATLANTA

DON'T JUST CALL IT AN INDIAN BUFFET

Chef Asha Gomez is highly respected. Self-service food is not. Here they meet in an informal, expansive, serene Indian dining spot. Gomez's accents are brilliant: fruit salad with coriander vinaigrette, vegetable stew in coconut-milk broth. But the star of the self-service line is the Kerala Beef Cutlet: It looks like a burger, tastes like meat loaf, acts like a barbecue sandwich, and proves that ready-to-eat is now easy to admire.



17.
mfk. chicago

SPANISH-STYLE SEAFOOD SERVED IN SERENITY

MFK looks like the sort of neighborhood bar where Jony Ive would hang out: pale, composed, and seafood-oriented. with a wine list offering few reds. "We're more of a white-wine place." the bartender said. The small kitchen turns out beautifully prepared food at a breakneck pace, so don't expect to linger. Try the meatballs-too juicy to resist-and hang in long enough to sample the buttery, classic, profoundly simple Basque cake, itself as pale

as the walls.

A DISH TO FLY FOR!



Hangover Food of the Year

HIRO SANDWICH Urchin Bistrot, San Francisco

• This poutine-like concoction includes fries, meatballs, jalapeños, and bone marrow, all served with an aioli-lathered baguette—a pile of food to cure morningafter ailments.



Pig of the Year

CRACKLING
PORCELET
Upland, N.Y.C.

• The juiciest, sweetest, most tender pork imaginable—or maybe beyond imagination—from a milk-fed Quebec piglet, plated with sweet peppers and a petite portion of persimmons.

⊼ Santina

A house specialty: cecina—a chickpea pancake—with toppings like Calabrian tuna

Apple-eiderweet

Apple-cider yeast doughnuts.

← Spice to Table

Fruit salad elevated with a house-spiced honey.

→ Kachka

Clockwise from top, all the vodka; Herring Under a Fur Coat (a seven-layer salad); dumpling-esque Siberian pelmeni.



GET LOST IN CARBOHYDRATE HEAVEN

Here you'll find goodies galore, assuming you can find the place at all, located on an access road adjoining a major highway. ("We're in a really weird location," the counter lady admitted.) The pastries are creative, compelling, and cost almost nothing: The bialy is warm and poufy, the flaky hand pie is stuffed with sausage and wild mushrooms, and the biscuit has mozzarella and bacon jam inside. Thank God for Google Maps.





Kachka PORTLAND, OR

AT KACHKA, DISHES

Remember the Cold War? Maybe not. You were probably in elementary school. Well, it's back, as the backdrop of this delightfully dark spot. Laugh away international tensions with zakuski (Russian snacks) and sixty different vodkas. Try the Herring Under a Fur Coat, a kind of savory parfait salad, and Siberian pelmeni, which are like dumplings, but, well, Russian. Then toast Uncle Joe—Stalin, of course.



Here comes America's next great food city

 Houston has so many cultural, geographical, and culinary advantages, it's a wonder the food took this long to get great. There's always been Texas barbecue, a huge head start. Also Tex-Mex, which northerners would learn to love if they tried the plate lunch at Irma's. And the city has firstclass sushi at Uchi, an Austin transplant. Then there's Oxheart and Underbelly, two of America's best restaurants.

Houston is not like anywhere else, not even the rest of Texas. It's in eating range of Louisiana, right on the Gulf of Mexico, not far from the Deep South. It's got outsiders moving in: Vietnamese, South and Central Americans. Houston is our fourth-largest city in population, but in food, it's poised to move into the top three.—A.R



→ Shi Hai

Crispy cruller rolls stuffed with shrimp mousse, which is real.

20. Ananda

FULTON, MD

INDIAN FOOD ELEVATED TO ROYALTY

Plenty of Indian restaurants aspire to elegance, but few pull it off as Ananda does, with its working fireplaces, dark wood paneling, oversize tables, and massive windows. You'll also find faultless simplicity if you order the bengan khas. It's essentially Indian pizza, made by spreading eggplant, tomato, and yogurt over garlic naan. Crab Malabar, a celebrated Indian dish, has never been so subtle. Credit goes to the use of colossal lump crab, equally celebrated in these parts.

21. Sarma

SOMERVILLE, MA

A MESS OF MEDITERRANEAN DELIGHTS

You'll love the food coming from the hardest-working kitchen in Somerville, an emerging Boston-area dining destination. Yes, food arrives randomly, small plates pile up, dishes to share are impossible to split. Fortunately, the Eastern-Mediterranean-style food is irresistible: gingerbread-scented pumpkin fritters, köfte sliders that are juicy little lamb burgers, smoked-salmon taramasalata. Culinary chaos can still be captivating.

22. Trove

SEATTLE

LIKE A PLAYGROUND FOR YOUR TASTE BUDS

Trove is two restaurants and a bar under one roof, plus a semi-outdoor frozen-custard stand. (Even if it's raining, which it always is, don't skip the stand.) Trove's noodle section is so noodle-centric, I found some in my Mexican posole. The grill-it-yourself section had mostly chewy meats, surely because I cooked them. Even I couldn't make the Wagyu tri-tip tough.



23. Pink Zebra

SAN FRANCISCO

A KINDER, GENTLER ASIAN-FUSION JOINT

Seated at a table, I ordered clams with chorizo and tongue with persimmons. Fantastic. Then I requested nigiri à la carte. The response: No sushi for you. Pink Zebra is a cute place with an annoying rule: No omakase reservation, no sushi—even if the tiny counter is empty. I argued. I won. I loved every bite. And the rule has since been relaxed. I had overcome the sushi-Nazi policy of Pink Zebra, my culinary triumph of the year.

24. Lo Spiedo

PHILADELPHIA

COURAGE UNDER A FIERY RED SAUCE

Come here for a little history and a lot of meat. Lo Spiedo is located just inside the old navy yard, where the battleship New Jersey was built. Almost as sturdy is the reginette bolognese. "Too much meat," I griped. "Marc Vetri knows what he's doing," argued a friend. He always does. Here you'll find glorified Americanized Italian food, including a gutsy celeryroot milanese sandwich. If vegetarians gave out medals, it deserves the Navy Cross.

25. Shi Hai

ALHAMBRA (L.A.), CA

A RARE BRIGHT SPOT IN DIM SUM

Sadly, dim sum tends to be the same everywhere: unchanging versions of shu mai and har gow roll by on carts. Terrible tea. Indifferent service. Shi Hai is way better: attentive staff. Choice of teas. Six kinds of slippery rice-noodle rolls, including one stuffed with barbecued pork and corn. It's not a Great Leap Forward, just fantastic small steps.

ALAN RICHMAN is a GQ correspondent.

Your New Excuse for a MidNight 12:37 SNaCK

CHris Buck

If you're grateful to Ricky Gervais and John Oliver for leaving their English fame for American anonymity (at first), then warmly welcome their heir: British comedian James Corden, the next host of CBS's 'Late Late Show'

IT IS JAMES CORDEN'S very last night at home in London's sleepy Hampstead. His bags are pretty much packed, he's feeling all *emotional* about it, and his house—which he and wife Julia have spent fourteen months renovating, agonizing over "wallpaper and floors and stuff," only to shutter the damn thing—will soon be latched for good. But rather than cook up one last supper, some grand Dickensian feast of mince pies or quince-glazed ducks or something, he's running out to pick up some sushi.

The L.A.-ification has begun.

Still! Don't think that the British actor and comedy writer (let's say, John Oliver crossbred with Chris Farley), who's moving to take Craig Ferguson's spot on CBS's Late Late Show, is about to go full Angeleno. His cheeks, both pairs, will stay that same Munchian shade of chalk-putty. He refuses, despite a recent dust-up involving the Daily Mail and his beloved asscracking "yoga pants," to dress for the paps. ("I still believe, If I put this hat on, no one will see me!") And don't even ask if he's gonna be one of those seven-assistant-having Hollywood big shots. "What is the problem with these people?! I mean, how hard is it to make a phone call? I don't understand it! Why would you put a gap in between you and something done guicker?!" he says, having irreproachably called us directly. "What are you doing, calling your wife and getting your assistant before your wife? Fucking madness!" (This, by the way, is his signature thing—Everyman warmth laced with some uppunching irascibility.)

Besides his work m.o., there are the two little Cordens to consider. "Babe! How are we going to protect our children against the vagaries of Los Angel-eeeeese?" Corden asks his wife. "I'm going to speak to them in a very posh accent," Julia deadpans. Jolly good.—SARAH BALL

Mar → Funnies from the late-night emcee in our video interview → GQ.COM







WEEKEND UPDATE

"I DON'T WANT to shock anybody," says Snyder, whose spring line is—sorry, Todd—shockingly good. "I try to start with the lowest common denominator—I think about everything that should be in a guy's wardrobe. And then I think about how I could re-invent it." That means stealing olive green back from the Army, making suits in cotton instead of wool, chopping the sleeves off sweatshirts, and turning sweatpants into dress pants. turning sweatpants into dress pants.
"Those pieces are my foundations,"
Snyder says. "They're investments you go back to time and again."
They're perfect for weekend carousing and/or slouching and will carry you from hosting your friend's birthday bash to birthday bash to watching *SNL* (even if it's the next day on DVR).



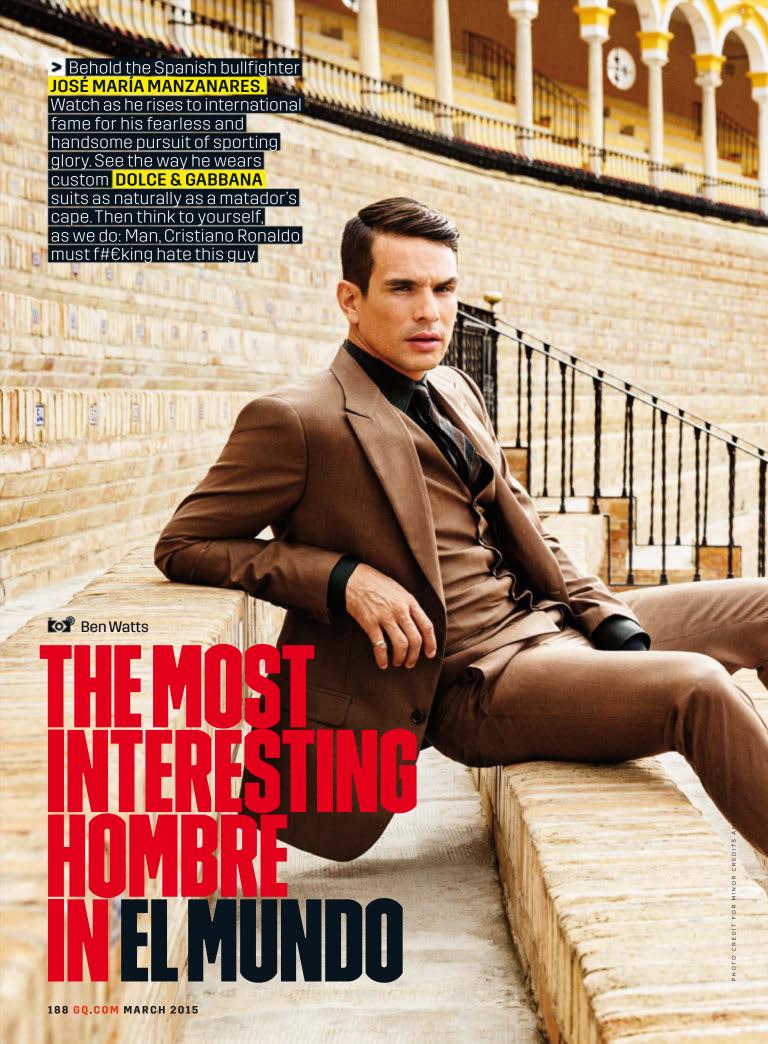
on Michael Che blazer \$695 t-shirt \$85 sweatpants \$195

ON KYLE MODIL'S
short-sleeve sweatshirt
(todd snyder
+ champion) \$88
shirt \$225
tie \$95
pants \$395

on <mark>colin jost</mark> suit (white label) \$795 shirt \$225

ON PETE DAVIDSO tuxedo \$1,995 t-shirt \$80

jacket \$1,995 t-shirt \$95 pants \$195 all by **Todd Snyder** for shoes and watches, see page 211. where to buy it? go to gq.com/go /fashiondirectories hair by losi at martial vivot salon. grooming by erin green at art department, set design by bette adams for mary howard studio. produced by cynthia cohen for right arm productions.





LIFE BY THE HORNS

FOR AMERICANS, the most surprising thing about José María Manzanares is the very fact of his existence-that a Spanish person who looks like that is also a real live trained-and-true bullfighter. That is, that he doesn't just play one in fashion magazines. Considering his billboard-ready face and the comfort he evidently feels being photographed in high-end polka-dot pajamas, you'd imagine the opportunity to be famous without risking one's life on a regular basis would come as a welcome alternative. But that would be overly dismissive of the lifelong commitment he's made to the craft-and the fact that his reputation still rides more on his exploits in the ring than on his looks.

The son of a prominent matador, the 33-year-old Spaniard had been headed to veterinary school when he decided he'd prefer a cape-twirling, pink-sock-wearing, gnarly-scar-collecting life. Though he knows he won't win over the PETA crowd, Manzanares is committed to spreading the gospel—exposure if not outright

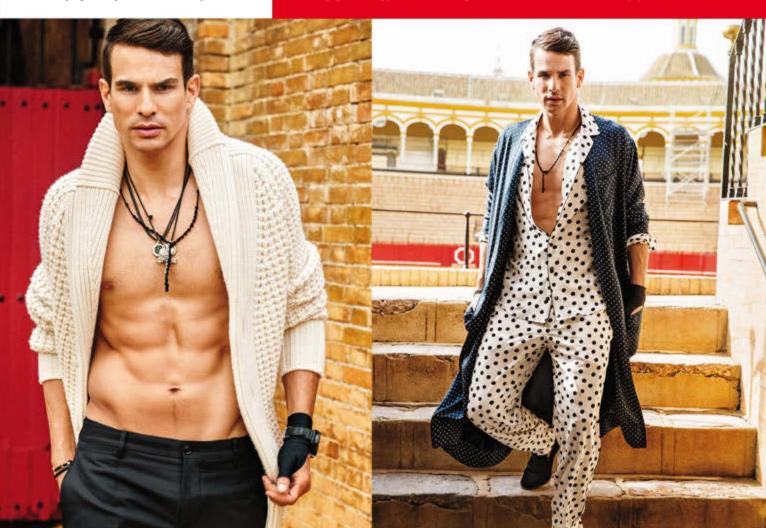
conversion: "It's important for bullfighting to be better understood for what it really is, not what people think it is." By which he means the rich tradition, the artistry, the toreros' reverence for the animals. "I'm hoping that little by little, people will learn more about what a bullfighter is, what his life is like, what he represents, the values he upholds." Each year, Manzanares spends seven months on the European circuit, then heads to the Americas to make the rounds there. In winter, he lives with his team to train for the coming season.

("You need to be in the right headspace for all those afternoons of hard work, risking your life in many cases—actually, always.") And though he's unwilling to give up the death scares outright now that he's become his sport's most public face in fashion—he was tapped by Dolce & Gabbana for their spring campaign—he's grown comfortable in the overlap. "Fashion has a lot in common with bullfighting, with what all artists have in common. You're just trying to express what you feel."

Still, though he may convince himself that they're occasionally one and the same, Manzanares isn't willing to cross over in full. "I'm not a model. If I'm going to be photographed, it's always as I am: a bullfighter."—GILLIAN BRASSIL

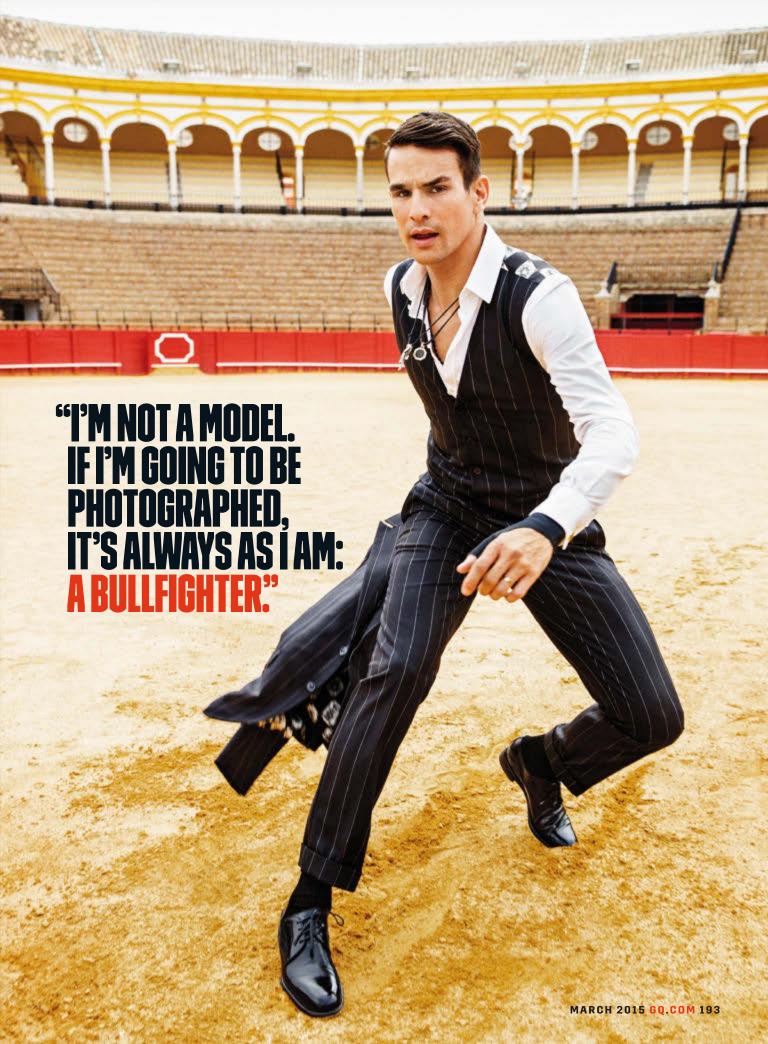
DOLCE & GABBANA, SARTORIAL TOREADORS

THE NEW LINE of custom-made finery by Dolce & Gabbana is called Alta Sartoria, and it's not for everybody. We know because Domenico Dolce told us. "We consider it an ode to male vanity," he said. "We have in mind a man who feels a hedonistic pleasure in his wardrobe, in finding the right fabric for a jacket, in working with a tailor on the details of his clothing." After fittings in the Milan or New York boutiques, each piece is handmade in Italy to the customer's specifications, however outlandish. "It's also," Dolce continued, "for the guy who may just want to hang out at home in made-to-measure pajamas."











▶ In this issue, we present two stories on the ways ACCIDENTS SHAPE OUR LIVES.* The first: a mystery that haunts the world. One year ago this month, MALAYSIA AIRLINES FLIGHT 370 disappeared from the skies. No trace, not even wreckage. The void has confounded experts, anguished families, and hatched endless conspiracy theories. But as SEAN FLYNN reports, some disturbing truths are emerging, including a clear trail of failure that turned a disaster into something so much worse



he red-eye to Beijing lifted
off the tarmac six minutes
late, at 12:41 in the morning,
and made a climbing turn over
Kuala Lumpur until it was pointed
northeast, into the dark over
the South China Sea. The aircraft,
a twin-engine Boeing 777, was

a marvel of engineering and avionics, one of the safest machines of any kind, ever, to transport people, and was flown by a pilot with more than thirty years of experience. The first officer, a young man who was engaged to be married, hadn't

been born when the pilot started flying, but he was fully certified and still had thousands of hours of flight time.

There were ten other crew members on Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which flew for the last time on March 8, 2014, and 227 passengers. More than two-thirds were Chinese nationals, and another thirty-eight were Malaysians. There was a Russian and two Canadians in business class, two Ukrainians in coach, and two Iranians traveling on stolen passports, from Italy and Austria, hoping eventually to slip into Europe. There was an Italian in 34C and a New Zealander in 19C. A French mother, two of her children, and her son's girlfriend filled a row of middle seats, and on the left side of the plane, two Australian couples were four days into an Asiatic tour they'd planned for a year.

There was a single American adult, in an aisle seat in the first row of economy. His name was Philip Wood, and he managed sales to high-end clients for IBM. The company had transferred him from Beijing to Kuala Lumpur, and he was flying back to close out some accounts and help his partner, Sarah Bajc, pack up their apartment.

Twenty-four seconds after the plane left the ground, air-traffic controllers cleared it to climb to 18,000 feet on a line to IGARI, a spot in the sky at the edge of Malaysian airspace and one of thousands of oddly named navigational waypoints airliners follow. Over the next eight minutes, MH370—the flight's call sign—was cleared for 25,000 feet, then 35,000, its cruising altitude.

Just before 1:08, the plane's ACARS (aircraft communications addressing and reporting system), which automatically

reports on various flight and mechanical systems, bounced a routine message off a satellite to a ground station. There was nothing abnormal.

Controllers in Malaysia watched MH370's label, a cluster of letters and numbers, stutter-step up their screens toward IGARI. The flight by then was out of primary radar range. At that distance, air-traffic relies on secondary radar, longer-range technology that gathers information—call signs, altitudes, headings, speed—from transponders in every aircraft. There are two of them on commercial airliners, because every system is redundant in case one fails.

At 1:19, just before MH370 reached IGARI, Malaysian controllers instructed the flight crew to switch their radio to the frequency for Ho Chi Minh control, which would take over beyond the waypoint. The co-pilot answered in a flat, professional cadence. "Good night, Malaysia three seven zero."

MH370 passed IGARI at 1:21. Twelve seconds later, its radar label disappeared.

Seventeen minutes passed before anyone was concerned enough to start trying to find the plane.

Air-traffic control in Malaysia and Vietnam radioed. Silence. Other pilots on other airliners tried, too. Static. Someone in the Malaysian Airlines operation center called the cockpit, twice, on the satellite phone. No answer. Every communication system had gone dead, even ACARS, which never sent its scheduled update at 1:37. Singapore air-traffic control hadn't picked up any odd blips. Neither had Hong Kong nor Phnom Penh.

A modern aircraft had simply vanished, an event as rare as it is disastrous.

A few hours later in Beijing, Sarah Bajc checked the status of Flight 370 online. *Delayed.* She'd sent a car to pick up Wood at the airport while she waited for the movers, who were coming at nine. Before long, she checked her computer again: News sites were reporting that a Malaysia Airlines plane had lost contact.

By the time she got the official phone call—she was listed as Wood's next of kin—she already knew MH370 was missing. The airline couldn't tell her anything more.

Nine months later, when I first met Bajc, no one else could explain, convincingly, definitively, what happened to that red-eye to Beijing. The plane still hadn't been found. Nothing from it—a suitcase, an in-flight magazine, a life vest—had washed ashore, at least not that anyone had come across. So maybe Philip Wood, maybe all of them, were still alive. There was still a chance, and Sarah Bajc was still willing to believe.

"Not unrealistically so," she told me in a café on a bright Malaysian morning. "The chances are very, very slim. A lot of zeroes in that percentage. But there's no proof that it crashed, which means it might have landed. We don't know."

When nothing is certain, everything is possible.

BROKEN NEEDLE, LIQUID HAYSTACK On April 11, 2014. a crew member searches for signs of the crash-a seat cushion, part of the fuselage-in the southern Indian Ocean. Officials in Australia—the country heading up the search-have "narrowed" their efforts to a piece of ocean the size of West Virginia.







COMMERCIAL AIRLINERS very rarely crash, but when they do there is always debris. It doesn't matter if the plane explodes at 35,000 feet or nose-dives into deep water or slams into a desolate Antarctic mountain: There will be wreckage. It might be days or weeks before they get to it, but investigators eventually will find the fragments and, usually, a recording of the cockpit sounds and another of thousands of bits of flight data. From those, they will figure out, to within a reasonable degree of certainty, why that particular plane fell out of the sky. They can determine if a spark from a loose wire ignited the fumes in a near-empty fuel tank (TWA Flight 800, in 1996), or if an air-speed sensor iced up (Air France Flight 447, in 2009), or if the pilot made a mistake (also Air France, as well as about half of all crashes, often in conjunction with foul weather, a mechanical failure, or both). It might take a while to sort out all the details-the recorders from Air France 447 weren't recovered for two years-but there is always an answer.

The search for that debris logically begins near where the aircraft was last known to be. So at first light on March 8, ships and helicopters and slow, lumbering aircraft began scouring the waters beneath IGARI. They found nothing from MH370, not even a rainbow smear of jet fuel, which is not uncommon in such situations because the sea is vast and planes do not fall in plumb lines.

By the end of the second day, the searchers had still turned up nothing. The Malaysian government at that point could well have known that MH370 was almost certainly nowhere near those waters. They had access to two pieces of information, the most crucial of which they kept to themselves, sharing with neither the public nor the search teams.

The first, according to a well-placed source, was that the Malaysian authorities learned as early as the morning of March 9 that MH370 had likely continued flying long after its radar signal blinked off

the controllers' screens. For almost seven hours, in fact, which means it was probably still in the air when search-and-rescue teams were swarming below IGARI. They knew that at 2:25 A.M., a little more than an hour after the flight's last contact, the plane's satellite-data unit powered up. From an antenna on top of the airframe, it sent a log-on request to an aging piece of hardware wobbling in space above the equator, which then relayed the signal to a ground station in Perth, both of which are owned by a British company called Inmarsat. This was a cry from the void, MH370 effectively saying "I'm still out here." Every hour after that, the Perth station bounced a signal off the satellite to the plane, asking if MH370 was still online. In the jargon, those are called handshakes, and the plane answered five of them-still here, hour after hour. Then, at 8:19 in the morning Malaysia time, the satellite data unit sent a second log-on request. It was never completed, and the plane was never heard from again.

None of those handshakes, by themselves, indicated which direction MH370 had flown, how fast or how high or, least of all, where the flight ended. All of that would need to be deciphered, if it was even possible to do so; the system was designed to

DEEP DIVES

FROM LEFT On April 8, 2014, an Australian diver searches west of Perth for debris; on April 15, Australian crew move the U.S. Navy's Bluefin-21 autonomous underwater vehicle into position to scour the surface of the Indian Ocean floor.

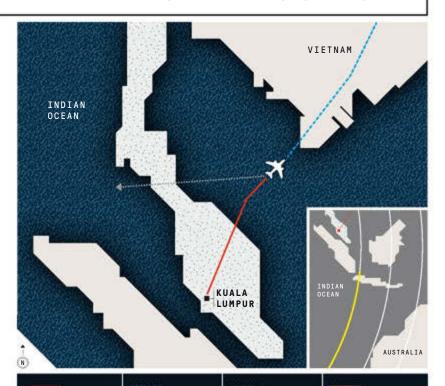
provide a communication link for phone calls and such, not location tracking. But it could safely be assumed a plane that remained airborne for seven hours was almost certainly many thousands of miles from where the search had begun.

Which leads to the second piece of information the authorities initially withheld: Malaysian military radar had tracked MH370 after it went dark. While civilians were frantically trying to contact a missing airliner, an unidentified dot blipped across military screens. After the plane went silent just past IGARI, it turned hard to the left and flew west, across the Malay Peninsula, then northwest through the Strait of Malacca, pinged by radar almost the entire way yet completely ignored. "The military should be on high alert, everyone knows that," Julian Tan Kok Ping, a Malaysian lawmaker, told me. "They should have scrambled fighter jets. If they allow an aircraft to fly in controlled airspace without a transponder

WHEN GOVERNMENTS
OBFUSCATE, THEY BREED
SUSPICION. AND WHEN THEY
DO SO INVOLVING THE LIVES
OF 239 CIVILIANS, THEY
INVITE—THEY ENCOURAGE—
CONSPIRACY THEORIES.



WHERE IN THE WORLD DID MH370 END UP?



» MH370 took off at 12:41 a.m., en route to Beijing. At 1:19 a.m., MH370 passed between Malaysian and Vietnamese radio control. » The pilots were never heard from again. Rather than continue on the anticipated flight path (dotted blue line), the plane took a hard turn left.

» Malaysian military tracked MH370 west. Satellites pinged MH370 as it flew on (probably south) for seven hours after last radio contact.

» Specialists used the satellite data to approximate its final position along an arc (yellow), and the search began west of Perth in the Indian Ocean.

and no one does anything, that's criminal. Imagine if MH370 had turned back toward KLCC." That's Kuala Lumpur City Centre, where stand the Petronas Towers, currently the tallest twin spires in the world. "As MPs, we've raised this in the press many times, we've raised this in Parliament many times," Tan says. "And there's no answer."

It's unclear exactly when the Malaysians realized the military had tracked MH370. In May, in a summary of the search, the Ministry of Transport said the information was retrieved from "a playback of a recording from primary military radar," which would suggest that no one was paying attention when that recording was made. Some early reports, on the other hand, most notably by Reuters, had military officials watching an unidentified and unresponsive aircraft in real time, and apparently not reacting. In any case, the military radar

was made public on the second day, and the search was expanded to the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea.

But the Inmarsat data strongly suggested MH370 wouldn't be anywhere close to there, either. On March 15, a week after the plane disappeared, Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak announced that the search was being moved to the southern Indian Ocean based on what he called, many times, new satellite data—the Inmarsat data. One could argue, as Razak did and not completely unreasonably, that revealing that information immediately would have been cruelly premature. The existence of the handshakes did not appreciably reduce the odds that MH370 had crashed. Announcing it had flown for hours without being able to say where would at best offer unwarranted hope and, at worst, horrific imaginings of a terrifying seven-hour death cruise.

On the other hand, one could also argue—much more convincingly—that revealing the Inmarsat data would have established a standard of transparency, and thus credibility, as the search continued. Yet the Malaysian government—which is basically the same government that's run the country since independence in 1957—has never been a model of transparency, and to become one in the glare of global media would have been absurdly embarrassing. A plane crash is a tragedy. Losing track of a plane that made a rogue pass unmolested over sovereign airspace and then kept flying for seven hours is tragedy compounded by farce.

That information delay, then, became the original sin of omission, seeming to corrupt everything that followed. When governments obfuscate, they breed suspicion. And when they do so in a matter involving the lives of 239 civilians on one of the safest and most reliable jetliners to ever fly, they invite—they *encourage*—conspiracy theories.

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IF THE LOSS of MH370 was implausible—when a hundred-dollar phone can pinpoint its position, how could a \$269 million aircraft get lost?—then the reason for that loss, in the ether of unverifiable speculation, could be equally implausible. The blankness of the investigation became an enormous canvas upon which any fear, rationally considered or raving lunacy, could be sketched into a workable, and not disprovable, theory. Ten percent of Americans, according to a CNN poll, believe the disappearance of an enormous aircraft involved nothing more complicated than an alien abduction.

The most common scenarios, of course, involve terrorists. One, which was gussied up into a hugely publicized Paris Match story by a French novelist, offers the possibility of MH370 being commandeered as a flying bomb and shot down by American fighters near a military base on the island of Diego Garcia. That was markedly different from, yet only slightly more sensible than, the other shoot-down theory, promulgated early and quickly forgotten, that the flight was accidently destroyed during a joint U.S.-Thai live-fire exercise. Since no debris has ever been found, there is a more robust subset of hijack theories: that MH370 landed somewhere. Various versions had it touching down on Christmas Island, the Maldives, Afghanistan, or Kazakhstan, to be either weaponized for future use or held for some other cryptic reason no one can yet fathom.

The possibility of a Kazakhstan landing was explained in fine-grained detail by Jeff Wise, a journalist and aviation writer who has studied MH370 exhaustively since March. In a six-part speculative exercise

posted on his eponymous blog, he suggested that the Russian in first class and the two Ukrainians in coach could have been Russian intelligence agents capable of disabling the crew and flying a precision path to a Soviet-era space base. The specifics are very technical, and there are problems matching parts of it to the available data. "The fuel model," Wise says, for instance, "doesn't really allow it." The route would have traversed militarized and tightly monitored airspace, and the motive is completely unclear, except Vladimir Putin is an irrational thug. But it's a reasoned, good-faith exercise, and Wise argues Kazakhstan is more probable than any other terrestrial landing and no more improbable than a crash into the ocean. "You either think the debris must have washed up by now or you think it evaded all those northern radars," he says. "Which seems more impossible to you?"

That is a difficult question to answer. A year ago, everything seemed possible. Perhaps, for example, it was a failed hijacking. Maybe there was a struggle and a grenade went off and blew a hole in the fuselage and the plane depressurized and everyone—captain, crew, passengers—died of hypoxia and the plane wandered off on autopilot for seven hours until it ran out of fuel.

A hijacking seemed plausible because of the way MH370 went dark all at once, as if someone had pulled several circuit breakers in rapid sequence. Those circuits are in a bay beneath the cockpit that

THE YEAR OF MOURNING
FROM LEFT On March 8, 2014, a relative of a passenger, at Beijing Capital International Airport, sought—and failed to receive—explanations about the fate of the flight; a prayer service in Beijing on April 8 marked one month since MH370 went missing.

is accessed either from the cargo hold or through a hatch beneath the carpet next to the business-class lavatory. That hatch is not locked, and it is not difficult to locate; indeed, there are YouTube videos showing how to access a 777's electronics bay, and what's inside. (Wise's theory requires the use of that bay.)

Then what of the pilot, Zaharie Shah? In the unaccountable realm of theorizing, Shah became either a madman or a hero. In the damning theory, he flew his plane into the ocean in mass-murder suicide because his marriage was falling apart or as an act of political dissidence, albeit an ineffective one, as he never bothered to tell anyone. And while other commercial pilots have deliberately crashed, none have flown for hours beforehand.

In the heroic version, MH370 was crippled by a catastrophic failure, one severe enough to sever communications but not to bring down the plane—and the pilot did his best before being overcome by fumes or hypoxia. But that's not quite right, either, since the first thing a pilot would do is drop to 10,000 feet, where the air is breathable, and there is no credible evidence MH370 ever flew that low.

Then there are the dark ops. In Malaysia, for example, two well-informed and perfectly rational people told me the key was the four tons of mangosteens, an exotic fruit, in the cargo hold. Perhaps those weren't mangosteens at all, they suggested, but rather, say, sensitive military technology that someone, probably the Americans because Americans do lots of nefarious things, didn't want to reach Beijing. So they remotely took control and flew MH370 like a drone to parts unknown, and killed everyone.

Possible? Well, yes. Those Malaysians weren't the only ones to mention Boeing's uninterruptible autopilot, a counterterrorism gadget that, according to its 2006 patent, could be switched on "remotely via a

communication link." But even if the plane had it, this seems like an awful lot of effort and death for a problem that could have been solved with a phone call—stop that plane!—or a few operatives sneaking past an airport-security apparatus that a pair of untrained Iranian refugees with bogus passports handily beat.

Yet are those theories really so easy to dismiss? Maybe, if there is nothing personal at stake. But if your wife or son or grandfather was on that red-eye to Beijing, the plane that no one can find and that left no debris and that was lied about, whether through incompetence or mendacity, in the hours after it vanished...then, no, it is not so easy. Nor should it be. Hope is durable, especially when it is alchemized with mistrust.

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THE FRENCH MOTHER on MH370 was Laurence Wattrelos. She was traveling with two of her three children—daughter Ambre and son Hadrien, 14 and 17, respectively—and Hadrien's girlfriend, another French citizen named Yan Zhao. They were returning from a week on a Malaysian beach to Beijing, where they lived because Laurence's husband, Ghyslain, worked there for years as an executive at Lafarge, a cement and building-materials firm. Lafarge had transferred Ghyslain back to Paris a few months earlier, but his family stayed so Hadrien and Ambre could finish out the school year.

I met Ghyslain Wattrelos on a gray December morning at a private club not far from the Arc de Triomphe. The first thing he wanted me to know was that many people had contacted him since March, and that he divided those people into three categories. The largest group can be fairly described as kooks. They tell him they know what happened to his wife and children because it was revealed to them in a dream or a psychic vision or perhaps (continued on page 208)







he accident—the first one—
occurred on the Wednesday night
before Thanksgiving of my senior
year in high school. It left one
friend injured and one dead, and for
a while afterward the whole thing
seemed so surreal and impossible
that all we could do—friends,

family, anyone connected but not in the accident itself—was try to re-create the simultaneities of that evening, the first person at the scene, the shock of the couple at the nearby house from which the call was made for an ambulance, and then:

who called whom, and who was where when they heard. Given our own shock, we couldn't imagine the parents of the victims hearing those first words: *There's been an accident....*

When the news reached my family that night, in that orbit of calls, my parents, perhaps like other parents among our friends, presumed their child might have been in the car, which wasn't the case, though might have been, had I made a different decision earlier that evening. For us seniors, it was a free night with no school the next day, a holiday from everything, including our cursed college apps. Mine was spent with my girlfriend, so I missed the pre-party and then the ride to the real party. And so I missed the accident, too.

There were two cars, belonging to Jax* and Flynn, driving from the beach north up through town to someone's parentless house. Riding with Jax was Seger, and with Flynn, Xavier. On a stretch of road by one of the town's country clubs, Jax lost control of his car, hit a telephone pole, and skidded a hundred feet into a tree. The crash drove the engine through the dashboard. The Jaws of Life were required to cut the bodies from the wreckage.

At that moment—as the first siren sounded, as the first numbers were dialed, as the bodies were gathered and rushed away—I was watching a movie/eating Chinese/on a bed with my girlfriend, I can't remember exactly. Lost in the oblivious haze of youth, I was certain, like millions of teenagers before me, that nothing would ever touch us there.

Until, of course, it did.

*Names have been changed throughout.

GROWING UP, we had this sort of unusual thing in our town: an ambulance service operated by kids. It's still there today, in fact-thriving. Then, it was housed in a defunct red train station that rattled every time a passing commuter train rushed by on its way to Manhattan. In winter, icy gusts came lunging through the walls. There was a garage with two ambulances, and off it, a cramped radio room. Inside the station was an open common area where presumably tickets had once been sold, but which now hosted our training sessions and organizational meetings. Upstairs there was a loft where the CPR manikins were stashed. Sometimes you'd forget and go up there at midnight to turn out a light and nearly have a heart attack at all those synthetic bodies laid out, staring dumbly at the ceiling.

The ambulance service had been founded in the '70s. It was as if some Hollywood execs had sat around spitballing one-line pitches for after-school specials, until someone blurted, "Emergency...but with kids in charge." Of course, we had adult advisers who played a vital role—and our both tender and mercurial fiftysomething patriarch, who cursed and yelled at everyone, calling them "boobie" in an attempt to gauge our toughness. And yet it was we teenagers who did the bulk of the work. We started in the radio room in ninth grade and graduated to gofer on the ambulance in tenth, then went on to become EMTs and ambulance drivers. As an experiment, the ambulance had succeeded a little too thoroughly, and by the time I came along, there were about fifty of us who worked there in one capacity or another.

Still, there were those in town who wondered: Could a 16-year-old EMT (someone who had only recently learned to drive

a car) really help at, let alone handle, the worst accidents? It became our job, then, to be overdiligent and professional so as not to let anyone down. On every night of the week, including weekends, holidays, and religious days, a crew was "on duty" at the rickety station, where we'd run through checklists, train, sit and do homework, or just flirt and shoot the shit, pimply, hormonal teenagers that we were. From 6 P.M. to midnight, we acted as first responders, clad in our "whites" (a curious uniform choice for those dealing in blood) and orange fluorescent jackets. The rest of the time we carried pagers—in school, at practice, wherever. And our precious weekends were soon filled with fund-raising. chores at headquarters, and more training courses, including hours logged at a local emergency room. There, we were taught to regard each new accident with a sort of dispassionate intensity, no matter how extreme the circumstance.

Initially, however, I remember a lot of time spent blowing air into those manikins, real lip to synthetic lip, thrusting palms down on fake chests loaded with thick springs, and, at the end, paper readouts issuing from a slot at the ribs, a ticker showing the peaks and valleys that gauged one's efficacy at giving CPR. Repetition made for perfection on those fake bodies, though reality, I would soon find to my dismay, could be different. When the grandfather of the boy next door keeled over on the lawn, I lined my palm up on his sternum as I'd been instructed—and

IN THE ZERO-SUM
OF THAT MOMENT,
IT DIDN'T EVEN
OCCUR TO ME WHAT
THE INVERSE
MEANT: LET IT BE
SEGER. AND HOW
GUILTY I'D
FEEL FOR YEARS
AFTER ABOUT IT.





had succeeded at so many times before on the dummies—and with the first thrust felt three real ribs give way.

When it came to treating victims, every kid at the ambulance had at least one call that remained indelible-maybe a multicar crash on the highway, maybe a cardiac arrest or a house fire or a head injurythat introduced us to a world of grief we hadn't known before, that took us behind the veil of our town. I recall responding to a daytime suicide, at a house not more than a mile from my own, and when we spilled out of the ambulance and hustled through the strobes in our bright uniforms, hoping to save the overcast day, fix the wrong, piece back the body-crazycompetent mini-adults that we were-one unimpressed police officer stopped us short on the doorstep.

"You're not going in there," he said. When we insisted, he exhaled an exasperated sigh and added, "She slit her goddamn wrists in the tub, and you're kids, and I'm not letting you in there." I remember we protested, outraged that he'd called us "kids," and we wouldn't leave the scene, waging our own quiet sit-in, until we were finally called off by an adult adviser. But even as we worked ourselves into a bruit, I had this nightmare image of a submerged naked body, blood streaming from her wrists, face twisted in some ghoulish rictus.

Half an hour later, I was sitting back in calculus, trying to figure out a derivative.

THE NIGHT OF the accident, I returned home from my girlfriend's house to find my parents and my 16-year-old brother sitting grimly at the kitchen table, a scene that undoubtedly played out in other kitchens across town, too. My dad, who would have been in his late forties at the time-my age now as I write this-was a business executive who worked long hours, seemed to have boundless energy for house projects on the weekend, and made sure we were at church each Sunday morning, where he often volunteered as a lector. My mom, a country girl transplanted to suburbia, possessed a deep reserve of patience for her four wilding boys. Among them I was the oldest, recently sprouting up an inch taller than my dad, attaining full, moody man-boy status. In that moment I knew nothing, really, and was being told nothing. My parents said they'd drive me to the hospital; I said I could drive myself, but they were having none of it.

As we left to go, my brother pulled me aside. He also worked at the ambulance service and had heard that the night's onduty crew had left the scene with two bodies. When my brother said one of them wasn't breathing, I reflexively thought, *Don't let it be Jax*, and repeated that in my mind, imploring some higher power as my dad drove me beneath the sodium points of light on the highway. In the zero-sum of that moment, it didn't even occur to me what the inverse meant: *Let it be Seger*. And how guilty I'd feel for years after about it.

AS A KID, I thought my town was a wonderland. The lawns were always freshly cut, gardens overflowing with explosions of color, the blue sky etched with mystical fans of ice from the planes that came and went from New York. Somewhere out there was the wild world, but here we lived in our own disassociated nirvana, a place where a kid felt protected and free. We rode our bikes everywhere. We swung on rope swings and swam in pools or at the beach. There was nothing really to fear, so my mom set us loose out the back door each day and we raced through the woods, to some neighborhood yard where there was always a game of football or Wiffle ball raging.

There, too, lived Seger, an athletic kid with blond hair and blue eyes. I remember one year splitting time with him at quarterback on our Pop Warner football team, the little guys with good hands who conveyed the ball to bigger guys, who then tried to run through, or over, the opposing team. Later, in sixth grade, we'd hung out with two neighborhood girls, meeting after school, loitering, trying out the first rehearsals of sexual attraction. He took the lead, with the confidence of one with older siblings. The louder and funnier and more kinetic he was, the more I struck a pose of dumb bewilderment.

And then we sort of lost track of each other. He moved to Jax's neighborhood, and they became close friends. I saw him here and there (continued on next page)



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but we didn't really overlap again socially until high school. By this time, he'd become starting safety on the football team—but had a sentimental streak, too. Late at night, at whatever party, he could be counted on to hijack the stereo, caterwauling at the top of his lungs to one of his favorite songs: "And them good old boys were drinking whiskey and rye...." He sang that song every time—and it became a ritual that made everyone laugh. Ah, there goes Seger again, we said. He sounds like a dying cat! Only later did we realize the irony. He'd been singing about an accident all along.

AT THE HOSPITAL that night, the waiting area was flooded in bright light and the stench of antiseptic. I kept replaying this disconnected memory of a summer Sunday earlier that year-the full-color positive to the stark negative of this moment-when I'd gone with friends from the ambulance to a remote reservoir where swimming was illegal, the sort of prohibition that was too hard to resist. We bought beer at some shady package store and, once on the right dirt road, pulled over and climbed through a hole in the fence, then hiked into a pine-lined lake where we leapt from rocky cliffs into clear drinking water. It was one of those endless afternoons, jumping, swimming, sunbathing on the rocks, all punctuated by salty gulps of cold beer as the day unfurled, then curled back on itself. Every hour felt like a day, and I remember returning home that night, my skin still hot from the sun, feeling as if I'd been gone a week.

Now here we were, perched on a cold November night at what felt like a certain end, in a state of suspension, as the seconds flew. The news was eventually delivered. Seger's dad arrived, and heard for the first time about his son's death. He was handsome like his son, with a smooth face, but now his expression contorted and he let out a high-pitched keen that made us all tuck our heads lower. Knotting our hands over our stomachs.

Afterward we sat all night—our circle of friends—stupefied, empty. We were all more or less facsimiles of one another. We got good grades, played sports, would soon be off to decent colleges. And now we were marked, too, by this night. So we waited for the news about Jax with the same sense of dread. When the sky shifted from black to purple, someone told us to go home, that there'd be more news in the morning. So we did.

WE'D HAD A DEAD CAT, of course—and our first dog. (R.I.P., Buttons.) There was my cousin Cindy, who drowned when we were both 5, but I'd been too young to comprehend.

And my dad's dad, whom I never really knew though wish I had, attached to some weird bag at the end. But the accident was the first time someone in my everyday life—someone on the bus, someone in the cafeteria, someone in my PE class—had just vanished. Up until that point, I'd yet to encounter a dead body on any ambulance calls. And now Seger's death led to the shock of that other question: Was Jax going to die, too?

No, it seemed, he wasn't. The morning after the accident, he struggled back up to full consciousness. Despite severe injuries, he was able to talk to his family—and he asked to see me, too. We'd been friends for nearly ten years by that point, first thrown together on a Little League baseball team. I drove back to the hospital, alone this time, wondering if he was disfigured or what he'd say, the Thanksgiving Day traffic gliding with terrible normalcy.

When I was shown into the ICU, there he lay, hooked and wired, legs in weighted traction, wearing a neck brace. He was so pale I could see a network of veins under his face. He looked as if he'd just washed up on a limpid tide after the storm, having been a shipwrecked party to some unspeakable acts. His cheeks and forehead were pimpled with the buckshot of the shattered windshield. He struggled to raise his head. And I couldn't look away.

When I'd first met Jax, at second base—we played the same position—he stood spewing flecks that sparkled in the bright sun, making a Tourettic sprinkler of spit. I took note of his oversize mitt (didn't he know that besides me he was the smallest one out here?), his untucked shirt, the points of sandy hair from the ridiculous shag beneath his maroon cap. He didn't quite fit in the frame—brash, misplaced elf that he was. Off the field he wore strange moccasin-like shoes he'd gotten while living in Europe.

Jax was a blurter, a motormouth, a fantastic nicknamer, the name capturing the thing in you that was your weakness or your greatest exposure. For instance, there was another kid we knew who spoke in chopped-up, sputering excitement and as a young teen could often be found puttering around the Sound in his whaler, jumping waves. And so he became "Hooten, Hooten, Merrily." (I'm not even sure what it meant, but it was perfect.)

And Jax was fearless. I saw him dive madly at ungettable balls and later fly into a rage at his older brother or the class bully, scary for the fury of his attack, his willingness to sustain a hail of blows if only to land one. Once he launched himself onto the hood of a moving car, trying to reach the driver, a boyfriend of his sister's. I saw him take flight many times from the wooden, paint-peeled railing at the pier, plunging into the warm water of the Sound, his wiry body in catlike adjustment to the force of push-off, the midair moment of peace, then always that little spasm of joy as he crashed through the water's surface.

Now here he was, Jax, the once mighty berserker, laid low. In legends, he would have been the knight felled by the act no one dared to make, the wading of some rough river, the arrow slung at the giant, the throwing of his body at Doom, sacrificing his life for something perhaps meaningless. But here, in suburbia, he'd marked the days of our boredom by stunts and diversions, driving, say, with

only his knees, to his girlfriend's, over four miles of twisty road. Or jumping from a moving boat. Or laughing that laugh that was on you and with you.

Everything in life held a joke, except this, right now. He rolled his eyes, trying to focus, smacked his cracked lips, unable to produce saliva for all the painkillers mainlined through the IVs needled in his arms. His tongue was swollen. He looked frightened,

What exactly had happened that night became a nagging mystery. Pixels of rumor and eyewitness account began to resolve into startling coherence.

diminished. "I'm sorry," he said with difficulty, then fell back to his morphine pillow.

That was it. But he'd needed to say it and wanted me to convey it to our friends—and beyond. Whatever had occurred on that night before Thanksgiving—and he had little to no memory of the accident—he took full responsibility for it. His eyelids fluttered shut while I stood awkwardly, watching him sink beneath the surface as if bearing witness to a drowning. Then I was shown out.

IT HAPPENS SOMETIMES with the dead. A magnetic field builds around their absence, compelling silence—or, worse, repelling memory, driving it underground. Until, later, it rises again. And it always does: A drive past the spot in the road, or the cemetery, or the house where Seger lived—then didn't—and the recollection of a life, and the accident that claimed it, comes back in bony fingers.

So how do you pry yourself loose of the past? We were teenagers then. We knew everything—and nothing. As the story got stranger, some of us acted out in unaccountable ways. There were those who disavowed the accident entirely, while others, like me, stupidly went looking for a second accident, to re-enact—or atone for—the first.

In the days and months after Jax hit the tree, we regularly visited him in his hospital room, where uneaten meals came and went on wheels, where he floated on the fine chemicals that inhibited his pain. When their powers dimmed, you could almost feel him sinking, wincing, fighting. He couldn't move, couldn't get up to pee on his own. Already thin, he quickly lost about twenty-five pounds. He had skin grafts, gnarled, scarred, screaming-red attachments on his feet and his legs, both of which were badly broken. And yet over time, as he regained his senses one by one, he tried to create a whole life up there: nurses who laughed at his jokes, a parade of friends that revolved through. His mother and girlfriend were a ubiquitous presence, as were the wobbly Day-Glo blocks of uneaten Jell-O perched on the nearby lunch tray.

Once, several weeks after the accident, I drove by the body shop to report back on the condition of his beloved sports car, the one that he'd paid for with money earned from odd jobs, as if recording the severity

of a crash he knew nothing about. But he pointed to a deck of glossy photos already taken by his brother. Fanning them in my hands, I found shot after shot of the ruined car. "It's still a miracle you lived," I told him, instantly realizing the larger cliché that everything you might say in such a situation sounded clichéd, which is when I shut up about all that.

Of course, Jax saw no miracle in his survival. Seger was dead, and he hadn't even been able to attend the funeral, the church pews loaded with friends who came as their own act of penance. ("The cemetery is my first stop when I get out of here," Jax kept repeating.) And there was no miracle because, he knew, someone would be made to pay.

Jax was a brutal realist. Hung like a tattered kite in the antibacterial blankness of his hospital room, held up by wires and sinkered lines, he awaited his fate. His body already broken, the blow would hurt less than Seger's death. But still, it was a desperate way to think. He'd been reduced to an immobile fugitive whose faith rested on the fact that he would likely be charged for his friend's death.

ONE OTHER THING about the dead: With them, so, too, goes God sometimes. This is normal, I suppose, in the aftermath of tragedy: to question one's faith. But no matter how grim the circumstances, Jax never seemed to have done the same, for he was one of my few friends who didn't go-by choice or force-to church every Sunday. There'd been a summer night between our sophomore and junior years when we sat out on the pier, just the two of us, Jax reeling in bluefish. After he filled a bucket with them and a school of thrashing bunkers moved on (they beat the water into a desperate froth above the blues that gave chase), we sat staring at the stars draped over everything and got into an argument about God. I said He existed; Jax said no way. We ended up in his bedroom, paging through his World Book encyclopedia as I tried to press my case with "facts." The more I jumped from one entry to another-Noah's Ark, the Ten Commandments, miracles-the more absurd my "scientific inquiry" sounded.

"It's all made-up," Jax said, laughing more at my stubbornness. "You're never going to find proof of Him in there."

At Seger's funeral, they played another of Seger's favorite songs, with its lyric *Childhood*

living is easy to do. People stood and said the right things. People—Seger's girlfriend and parents, family and friends—became distraught.

I wanted to show some emotion, too—because he would be badly missed—but there I sat, boiling at God/no God while otherwise disembodied, bringing the dispassionate intensity of my EMT training to every detail so I could report it back to Jax. As if we were all part of one body that could be fixed somehow, as if we could tick off the checklist—airway, breathing, circulation—to find the hidden ailment stuck in the left ventricle, and be saved.

SOON THE ENFORCED patterns of our quasi-martial school life reasserted themselves: We dutifully went to our classes, to physics (where the teacher prattled on about the inadequacies of highway entrance ramps, chalking on the board in a swirl of scribbles all the horrible ways you could die while entering the faster flow of traffic) and English (we were reading Gatsby now, the green light, the deadly car accident, the body in the pool) and calculus (as if to solve a proof might put the universe back together, reveal a different god). The swim season had begun, hours lost in bubbles, lap after lap staring at the black lane line of my own failing. And of course I continued riding the ambulance, showing up at random accident scenes to splint the broken femur or bandage the bloody hand.

There was a night when we were called to help a man hit by a car. He'd been thrown to the side of a busy main street, bloody and covered in slushy dirt. He was drunk and belligerent, and as the cars came and went and the strobes lit his face, it slowly dawned on me that he was my old swimming coach, Mr. Wharton, a guy I really revered. When I told him who I was and reminded him that he'd coached me over hundreds of hours in the pool, he tried with difficulty to look me in the eye. How many times had he pumped me up, or screamed at me in the pool to quit slacking, or celebrated a come-from-behind win, all to show he cared? But on the shoulder of the road now, unable to focus on my face let alone stand in place, he said, "Why don' ya go f-f-fuck yourself!"

Much more polite was the concussed kid at the ice rink who gently barfed on me when I bent over him, covering me with bilious warmth. "I'm sorry," the boy mumbled.

FROM HIS FIRST return to consciousness, Jax had no memory of the accident, none whatsoever, but accepted his guilt as a reflex. Of course, we, his friends, didn't care about blood-alcohol levels and toxicology tests. He'd made a bad mistake, was filled with contrition, and had our instant forgiveness.

But Jax's lack of memory didn't stop the police in their investigation; it drove them deeper. What exactly had happened that night became a nagging mystery. Pixels of rumor and eyewitness account began to resolve into startling coherence.

For instance, I had friends who, at the time of the accident, had just finished playing paddle tennis at the country club up the road. They'd heard the loud crash, and when they came out of the parking lot, they were startled by a car moving past them. Later, when

piecing it back together, they kept wondering: Why was Flynn's car driving away?

But all these things soon became clear to Jax when the police paid him that awaited visit one day in his hospital room, offering a surprising theory that went like this: On that dark stretch of twisty road, as Jax zoomed north, Flynn's car went to pass, bumping the rear left panel of Jax's car, which sent him careening off a telephone pole, into the protracted skid that listed left to right and hurtled his car into the tree.

Could it have been true?

When confronted with the theory, Jax was incredulous. According to the police transcript from the taped interview, he said, "I don't think any of my friends would do that.... First of all, [Flynn] and I are damn good friends."

(Beneath the fusillade of his verbal assaults, one of Jax's greatest redeeming traits was that he saw those in his inner circle as figures of unimpeachable character, as loyal as he. For all the sport he made of us—and we of him—he was absolutely blind to the deeper stamp of one's defect. His belief in his friends was so complete it verged on naïveté.)

Sometime around Christmas, however, Flynn's car was impounded, and the police would later say that paint found on its front fender seemed to match the color of Jax's car. By spring, Flynn had been charged with negligent homicide, reckless operation of a motor vehicle, and evading responsibility. The narrative that had Jax in a moment of singular teenage elation and irresponsibility now opened to another possibility: two cars traveling at a high rate of speed when one car passed on a tight turn and drove the other off the road. Or this: Flynn's car passing without warning. That is, as much as Jax had screwed up, maybe it hadn't been all his fault in the end.

so MUCH OF what happened in my town—the ancient town I knew and loved, the sprinkler-fed garden that existed during the Reagan Pleistocene in one of the outer rings around Manhattan—was never spoken of, or if so, only in whispered gossip. Affairs, eating disorders, teenage pregnancy, trips to rehab: Everybody seemed to know everybody's business, but it was cloaked and closeted. No matter how egregious or boorish the behavior or betrayal, to say it out loud, to reveal it beyond the social circle for which it was meant, was an affront almost as egregious. Every scarlet letter was partially hidden.

This is true of many places, or perhaps true of *every* place. No small shame accompanies the moment when our failings are made public—and it's with tense, bated breath that most wait for the unpleasantness to go away. However unsettling the news, a year or two or three and it can be relegated to the snowdrift of memory and then forgotten, replaced by the new drama of the day.

As a child, I found this disorienting. The parents were whispering about *something*, something with intimations of pain or dread, dark fairy tales of some sort, but *what*?

The charges against Flynn made the story uncomfortably public, and soon the paper ran a long article detailing the events of that night before Thanksgiving; the strained, surreal situation at our high school of friends trying to pick sides, or figure out what to believe



in the first place; and the tragedy of alcoholrelated car accidents in our town. Was it suburban privilege, or our access to cars, or the dark, winding roads? The police captain was quoted as saying that over the course of the past three years, a dozen young residents had died in automobile crashes. The pastor said he'd never seen such "tragedy with youth." The leader of a youth religious group claimed, "There's nothing but victims."

ONE NIGHT during our monthly organizational meeting at the ambulance service, in a room packed with fifty kids—everything coming to a standstill at twenty-minute intervals as another commuter train roared by—I found myself launching a prayer, the first, really, since the night of the accident. This particular evening included the awarding of special gold stars, reserved for the members of a particular crew for an exceptional call, our version of the Medal of Honor. This crew, as I remember it, had responded to a very bad crash on the interstate, had performed CPR under harrowing circumstances, and had

To be so recognized was the pinnacle, to have your name called to come down and receive a star from the ambulance service's founder, to be so distinguished for heroics among your own hypercompetent, wildly applauding peers. (We all knew they'd seen and done something we both hoped to and hoped *not* to.) It meant that for at least that moment the prophecy was true: You were so good, in fact, that you *could* raise the dead.

brought someone back to life.

Dear God, I found myself praying, give me something horrible and bloody. Let my next call be a multiple-car crash with gasoline glugging all over the highway, or a cardiac arrest in a house fire, or a kid electrocuted on the railroad tracks. Let it be a shark attack or an alien invasion, whatever makes the best movie. Whatever is the most impossibly fucked-up, Lord. Just let me lay my hands on some big, honking, metal-twisted tragedy, so I can work my own miracle this time.

JAX CAME OUT OF the hospital with snow on the ground, then convalesced at home for a while. When the police asked to talk to him, he went without his lawyers, against their advice, and tried to answer what he could about the accident. Eventually he returned to school on crutches, which later gave way to this clunky stimulating device he'd sometimes wrap around his leg and plug into the wall, what we called his "bone machine." He hobbled the same halls as Flynn, but they studiously avoided each other now while the various lawyers prepared for the criminal trial. Meanwhile, it seemed clear that Seger's family would bring a civil suit of some sort, perhaps against all the boys. But at least on the surface, everything carried on, despite the awkwardness. College applications were completed and sent out; no one got dumped by his girlfriend.

Time accelerated. The snow melted, the season changed, and our town bloomed: daffodils and forsythia at Easter, the dogwoods and cherry trees not long after. Lawns turned green again, the leaves drawing lush curtains over everything. The pier was

repainted; boats were put back in the Sound, their sails snapping in the wind.

With the passage of time, Jax doubled his efforts to retrieve some shard of absent memory. The most important night of his life to that point and he couldn't remember anything but leaving Seger's house to go to a party. It was some cruel, cosmic joke. His antipathies, guided inward by guilt, now had an outward target. When Flynn pleaded not guilty to the charges, reiterating through his lawyers that he hadn't been at the accident scene that night—a version of events backed by Xavier—Jax became animated again. As they maintained their innocence, Jax's fury grew.

It was simple: Knowing what Jax believed they knew, how could they have left him there? And where had they gone?

It was hard for him to concentrate on anything but the accident—it all went back to that stretch of road. We drove it every night, in our minds. And Jax tortured himself with trying to remember. Eventually, in conversation with his doctors, it was agreed that he would visit a Yale psychiatrist who used hypnotism. It was maybe something Jax would have once regarded skeptically, but what other choice did he have?

The session lasted nearly two hours. He left the psychiatrist's office not knowing anything, hypnotized as he was—nor did his parents. The psychiatrist promised that after reviewing the videotape, he'd send it along. Jax could only confirm what the psychiatrist had said, that things had gone "very well," whatever that meant.

A few weeks later the videotape arrived. Jax called, I drove down to his house, and we joined his parents to watch it for the first time. When Jax appeared on the television screen—or what I remember of Jax on that screen—he sat straight up, wearing a button-down shirt. His eyes were shut, and he seemed fairly relaxed, answering some basic opening questions. He was apparently already hypnotized, and the psychiatrist pointed out a needle stuck halfway into the flesh between his thumb and pointer finger, though Jax said he felt no pain and seemed to have no knowledge of the pin.

The psychiatrist then asked Jax to navigate the first four-fifths of the night in question. Jax described how Seger had loaded in with Jax at Seger's house, riding shotgun, how Flynn and Xavier followed in the other car. Jax led them up Ocean to Main, Main to Birch, Birch to the high school. Then the two cars emptied through the high school parking lot, turned left onto Coral, and took a right onto High. At this point, they were a quarter mile from the tree.

IN THE VIDEOTAPE, Jax, whose eyes are closed but tracking beneath the lids, seems at ease charting their progress. The psychiatrist leads him slowly, asks him to regard the action as though it's "a photograph." Jax is talking to Seger, music on the radio, streetlights passing in longer intervals now, the speedometer needling: twenty, twenty-five, thirty... Then he's on the straightaway before the curve with the maple tree, and the psychiatrist says, "Concentrate on your rearview mirror."

There are leaves skittering, dark branches overhead, a wedge of light before the sports car. He reaches to turn up the music, presses the gas. The lights are reflecting in the rearview mirror, the other car right on his tail. He is talking to Seger.

He's talking to Seger. The music is blaring. Leaves are skittering. The road takes a turn. Music, leaves, dark branches. Seconds from hitting the tree, he looks in the rearview mirror, answers the psychiatrist. "I see [Flynn's] car," he says, "see him cut out left. He's getting closer. What's he doing?" For the first time, he seems to be talking not to the psychiatrist but to himself. "He's almost parallel," he says. "There's no way."

His eyes shut tight. He looks stricken, thin lips pressed together. And then his body rocks once, very hard.

DID IT HAPPEN LIKE THIS? If you'd seen the tape, you might have thought so. At the very least, it gave Jax a narrative to which he could finally cling as the courts began to parse the evidence of what had occurred that night.

First came the criminal charges against Flynn that hovered over him for a year, ending in a courtroom drama that found Jax hobbling in on crutches and Flynn home from college accompanied to court by a dozen family members. Despite several eyewitnesses placing Flynn's car near the scene after a loud

Dear God, I found myself praying, give me something horrible and bloody. Just let me lay my hands on some big, honking, metal-twisted tragedy, so I can work my own miracle this time.

crash, the prosecutor admitted that it was "a difficult case to evaluate" and decided not to prosecute. He said his decision was based on the reliability of Jax's hypnosis, and the judge dismissed the case. Outside the courtroom, Flynn's lawyer said the ruling "completely vindicates my client" and that Flynn was headed immediately back to college.

In the wake of that dismissal came an array of civil suits that dragged along for years, yet after Jax's and Flynn's lawyers settled with Seger's family, everything whittled down to one: Jax suing Flynn for damages.

Nearly four years later, the newspapers covered that trial blow by blow. On the stand. Flynn testified that they'd been drinking 7-Up and vodka at Seger's house, detailing the route of his travels, which was nearly the same as Jax's, claiming he'd never seen an accident and only learned about it twenty minutes later, after arriving at the party. Under cross-examination, when questioned about the matching color, he said, "I never hit [his car] before, nor any other...car." Other details emerged: They'd begun drinking around 6 P.M. and left for the party around 9:30. At an intersection well before the site of the accident, Xavier had jumped out of Flynn's car and run ahead to Jax's for matches, after which they traveled several lengths behind Jax before pulling away along a road leading to the party.

It was senior year, 17 years old, the soccer and football season just over, a party in the offing. Could life have been any better?

AT THE END of the school year, just before prom, my prayer was answered: On a humid, cloudy night, I got my call. Already I'd racked up my cardiac arrest (that neighbor of ours) and a chaotic highway accident (an unsatisfactory broken femur), but this sounded promisingly bad.

We were summoned to a vast seawater farm, with its rocky hillocks and ancient oaks, a place we knew for its Revolutionary War battles and midnight cow-toppling. This night, however, the darkness was almost a substance, and even as we directed our spotlight up into the trees, the rays were absorbed, leaving nothing to see. Eventually we came upon a car on the shoulder with its hazards blinking, someone who had witnessed the accident and rushed to help. The ambulance stopped, and I jumped out.

The way I'd dreamed it always involved saving someone. I would perform some suitable miracle, and later, in the most ridiculous part of the fantasy, my victim and I would become friends, exchange gifts, and if she was pretty, maybe get married, her wheelchair being proof that I'd snatched her from sure death. Now I ran over soggy ground to the car. I shone a flashlight over boulders and downed branches. The car was off in the trees, sitting a couple of feet back from the gnarled trunk of an oak, the hood accordioned to half its normal size. The driver's door was ajar, and a dark figure loomed in back, the Good Samaritan trying to pull and hold traction from his awkward angle.

Despite his best efforts, the woman's head still lay facedown on the steering wheel. I could smell gasoline and manure-and gin and beer. I, too, was in an awkward spot, down on one knee inside the open front door. I positioned the flashlight on the dash, and then, as I placed my hands over each side of her head, over her ears, with both my pinkies lifting from below her jaw, her face rose before me. Her skin was soft to touch, but she was badly bloodied, and her nose, where there had been one, was now just a piece of bone. There was a clean hole in her forehead, and something green and gooey seeped out. Her eyes, half shut, were white. She was groaning softly, rhythmically, the kind of groan that reflected a pain so deep it may not have been felt consciously.

I regretted my decision the minute I made it. And now we were stuck together.

It was going to be a long time before we could move her-we were going to need the Jaws of Life to get her out—let alone before she would see an emergency room. The girl or woman, maybe in her mid-twenties, had hit the tree going very fast, fast enough for her skull to have been punctured and brain matter to have seeped out.

I can recall a lot about the minutiae of that night, about how the firefighters arrived, lighting huge spots on the car, making it seem like day in that glade, and then the whining of the saw as they cut her out. Another ambulance arrived, with grown-up paramedics authorized to administer drugs, which they did, running lines from drip bags

to the veins in her arms. There must have been two dozen people working, spectating, helping, at the height of the action. And then, after they cut her loose, I remember standing on the back runner of the grown-up ambulance, standing there as they sheared the clothes from her body-her skin was pale, her breasts full-and put in more lines and an oxygen mask over her face, trying to stabilize her before leaving for the hospital.

Afterward, when the grown-up ambulance went screaming off, everyone took their things and quickly retreated. We were pretty shook up; someone on our crew was crying. The woman was in a deep vegetative state, on her way to death by morning. And we'd done nothing to change that. I myself came closest to a feeling when the clouds parted and the moonlight came down over everything, including the serrated wreckage, in thick, pale, silver beams, a moment that could have been godly but was nothing of the sort. The feeling was of betrayal and shock.

Now whenever my mind slips to such naive meditations-these mock-heroic dreams of saving anyone from anything-I need only conjure that girl's face in my hands again. I need only hold that unmendable body close to realize how far I'd traveled from Thanksgiving. I got what I'd wished for, and I wanted to give it all back.

ONE LAST MEMORY of that night: When I came home in my ambulance whites and orange fluorescent jacket, splatters of blood on my sneakers, my father was sitting at the kitchen table, his work arrayed before him in scribbles on the yellow legal pads he favored. I gave him a few details, leaving out the part about when the girl's parents showed up at the scene.

"It sounds pretty bad," he said. "Yeah, it was," I said.

There was a pause, a long one. I couldn't look him in the eyes for fear it would all come out, all at once, in a great overwhelming gush, everything I'd held down. He might have already understood this. But I'd spent the year arming and armoring myself, and no one dared to approach anymore.

My father sat at the table, his face registering a father's concern. If he had something he needed to say-or a question to ask-he thought better of it. Or I cut him off, on my own at last. "Good night," I said, putting my foot on the first step of the back stairway leading to my room, unmoving for a moment, then shifting my weight heavily to climb.

"Good night, son," said my father.

THIS PAST THANKSGIVING marked the thirty-third anniversary of Jax's car accident and of Seger's death. For a long time afterward, you could see scars of the wreck on the trunk of the maple tree they hit, written in what seemed like Sanskrit. It was hard to look at; but for the few marks, the tree itself seemed to flourish, carrying no memory of that night.

Over time, the enormous trunk healed itself, its bark without blemish, and then one day it was simply chainsawed to widen the sidewalk. In all those years that the tree had loomed there—blooming its gaudy leaves in the spring, losing them like discarded twenties in the fall-I'd pass by searching for evidence that the accident had actually happened, that it hadn't just been a dream. My attitude was coldly forensic. I often thought to stop and touch the markings like an archaeologist, though never did. When the tree suddenly vanished-only pale sawdust littered the spot-there came this rush of feeling: sorrow, elation, guilt.

In the years after, Jax built a hectic, successful career in finance. Sometimes, when visiting home, I might drop in to find him hungover on a Sunday, on the couch beneath a blanket, watching old horror films. Eventually, some time after the rest of us, he married and had children. A few years back, when I told him I wanted to write something about the accident, he said, "Write the truth, then."

It took a long while, because as I found, the magnetic field around the dead really does repel memory at first. But once I let it all back in, I couldn't shake Seger, the one who couldn't speak at all, the one who was suddenly everywhere. One newspaper article from the time of the civil trial detailed the courtroom testimony of a financial expert who was asked to assess the amount of money Seger might have generated in his life. The expert said \$1.3 million was a fair guess, which would amount to about \$2.8 million today, but it seemed all the more tragic to reduce his life to a number like that. Give us any other number: YouTube videos sent or dogs owned, favors for neighbors or baby pictures e-mailed. Before the rock closed over the vault, I wish someone had speculated about what he'd found that night -God or no Godwhen he passed through the tree.

Perhaps we really are surrounded by the past, made prisoners of it. No matter how far we travel, how hard we try to forget, the scarred tree forever stands by the side of the road, if only in our minds. The only way to drive by is to set the past straight, once and for all, by remembering.

Talking to my brother, a lawyer now with kids of his own, I ask what he recalls about that night, and he says two things: (1) that the EMT from our ambulance service had told him something he couldn't ever forget, that Seger had been found with a shard of glass in his eye; and (2) that I had originally planned to join Jax and the rest of them on that evening, prior to the party.

And maybe if I had, I would have missed the opportunity to write this down, as I have, which is the only way I can make sense of anything or realize ultimately that there's no sense to be made of it: that once upon a time in a faraway town, we grew up-and some of us lived. And some of us tried to turn away but never quite could.

But most of all, if I'd been there that night, I couldn't tell you now that Jax, my old friend, can still be a beautiful pain in the ass and the truest person I'll know. If I were never to see him again, this would be my memory of him, of that year: the bucket full of blues, the encyclopedia without God, the energy of his wiry body flying, bowed in the sun, trying to remember why he ever wanted to leave this earth in the first place.

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the entrails of a goat. Next are the mourners, people who've also lost wives or husbands or children and want to share their grief or ease his sorrow or maybe both.

The third category is composed of journalists or, rather, those who introduce themselves as journalists. He splits them into two subgroups, because some of them do not appear to be journalists at all. They ask questions, he told me, and he gives them answers, but they never follow up and never write anything, and he never hears from them again. He suspects, frankly, that they are spooks, trying to figure out how close he is to finding out what happened to MH370.

I told him I am not a spook. Wattrelos gave me a half nod and a half smile. A real spook wouldn't tell him, anyway.

He was in the air when his wife and two of their three children boarded MH370. He'd left Paris the night before to join them in Beijing for a week, and his flight landed at about four o'clock in the afternoon. While the plane was still taxiing, he switched on his phone. There was a text from a friend at Lafarge. "I'm sorry, Ghyslain," it read, "for what has happened."

French diplomats were waiting at the gate. He has spoken to only a few actual journalists since then, and that is the part they usually want to talk about. Often they want to photograph him at home, preferably weeping over pictures of his wife and children, which he understands but isn't comfortable with. And really, is it even necessary, staging a display of something so obvious? "Of course it is horrible, what we're going through," he said flatly and firmly, simply to get the matter out of the way. "I'm alone at night now. It's all a black hole. It's awful."

Nothing more needs to be said of grief. Wattrelos did not invite me to breakfast to discuss his emotions, with the notable exception of announcing his dominant one at the outset. "I'm not sad anymore," he told me. "I'm just...I don't know how to say it in English. In French, it's *colère*. Angry, but more than that..."

Furious?

"Yes. Furious."

He is furious because he does not believe the Malaysian authorities—and quite possibly, to varying degrees, the American, British, Australian, French, Indonesian, Thai, and Singapore authorities—have been truthful. Which is a reasonable assumption, considering the Malaysians were not, in fact, truthful in the immediate aftermath of the plane's disappearance. "They had something to hide from the very beginning, that's all I'm saying," he said. "It pisses me off when journalists say it's a mystery, the biggest mystery in aviation

history. No, it's not. It's a cover-up. Maybe the reasons are good, but we need to know."

A good reason, he said, would be if MH370 had been hijacked, which is what he initially thought. "If it's a hijacking, you have no choice: You fly it somewhere and you shoot it down," he said. "That I could understand. If Malaysia or the U.S., if they shot it down to avoid another 9/11, I think everyone would understand that."

But when weeks passed without any wreckage being found, Wattrelos began to suspect the plane might have landed, though where or for what purpose he could not say. He is well versed in all the theories, but he did not favor one over the others.

"Everything is possible," he told me. "But they're lying to us."

Wattrelos's disdain for the French government is personal, and it began with an official silence. "When something happens to French people, they always say something," he said. "Always. For this flight, they never said a word. Nothing. To me, that is very strange."

He wrote a letter to the French president, François Hollande, outlining his concerns, and got banal generalities from an aide in reply. "My interpretation is they can't say they don't know anything," Wattrelos said. "He didn't want to lie to me." In March, he asked a French judge to begin an inquest into MH370 as an act of terrorism; in late August, his application was denied for jurisdictional reasons he does not find convincing. "That's why I strongly believe they"—he meant the French and, by extension, several other governments—"know what happened."

Wattrelos has one surviving child, a son who is 21. "I wake up every morning for two things: my son and this fight," he said. "But everything else is awful. And when the fight is over, what will happen? It might be worse, this is true. But for now, I have this fight."

Part of that fight required hiring a private investigator. Wattrelos, Sarah Bajc, and the families of two Indian passengers raised a few thousand dollars on crowdfunding site Indiegogo to pay him, but by December the money was running out and the P.I. wasn't having much success. Maybe it would have been easier if more people had been involved, the relatives of the Chinese and the Malaysians on board. "One of the problems we have," Wattrelos told me, "is as an association, the families, we are not strong."

A week after we had breakfast in Paris, Wattrelos flew to Kuala Lumpur to see Bajc and the P.I. I met him for coffee in a hotel lobby overlooking a freeway. When he lived in Beijing, Wattrelos used to visit Malaysia fairly often. Nice place to vacation. But this was his first time back since his wife and children disappeared. "The airport," he'd told me earlier, when the talk was of failures and lies, "we say it's a cheese with holes." How else did two Iranians on stolen passports slip through?

This time, he told me about his daughter. Before she boarded MH370 with her mother and her brother, she was texting with a friend. *I'm very happy to be going back to Beijing*, she tapped out in her last message. *I'm going to see my father*.

Wattrelos looked at the traffic for a moment. "So that's what I'm thinking," he said, "when I see this airport."

SARAH BAJC AND Philip Wood had been together since the autumn of 2011. She'd been in Beijing for eight years, first with Microsoft and then with a Chinese technology company, but she'd cashed out of both and gone back to school for a master's degree in education so she could teach business and economics to high school kids. She was out with friends one night in an expat bar, and they wanted to go dancing. She didn't. She stayed at the bar and ordered a drink.

"I've never seen a woman drink bourbon," the man two stools down said. "Especially Wild Turkey."

They were living together soon after. They were both divorced, and it was good, Bajc told me, for her children to see her with Wood, a man who was respectful and kind and openly affectionate. They had similar personalities, generally calm, appropriately playful. "Friends would meet him," Bajc said, "longtime friends, and they would say, 'Oh, my God, he's a male version of you.'"

The movers arrived on time the morning of March 8, more than two hours after Wood should have been on the ground. She got the official phone call when there were strangers in her apartment, packing her life in China for a new one in Kuala Lumpur.

CBS interviewed her the next day. She said the things people usually say in those first startled hours of cavernous grief, the most important and unsurprising of which was

"Speaking as a career public servant," Dolan said, "if you have a choice between a conspiracy and a stuffup, go with the stuff-up. It's a good rule of thumb."

that she did not accept that the man she loved was truly gone. "I'm personally not willing to give up hope that there's a chance we'll find survivors, that we'll find the plane," she said. "There just has to be a chance."

That was not, she told me, reflexive denial. She did not believe then, and certainly did not believe in December, that MH370 simply fell out of the sky. "By the ninth, I was sure it was something intentional," she said. Partly that was instinct, but it was also logic. Even then, in the very beginning, there were obvious hints. Airliners, with their multiple and redundant communication systems, do not go completely silent all at once unless they've been destroyed or hijacked. Yet there was no wreckage in the shallow and heavily traveled waters beneath IGARI, which suggested those transponders and radios and such had been deliberately turned off. "It all pointed to an abduction," she said. "And I think I knew at that point already that it had to be talked about. Otherwise it would be spun."

Bajc believes the Malaysian government already knows what happened to MH370. If the authorities weren't truthful in the beginning, there's no reason she should assume they're being so now. "The country is covering it up," she said. "That should be considered criminal conduct, the cover-up. What they're covering up, we don't know."

We were at a café in a pleasant neighborhood of Kuala Lumpur, near the apartment she and Wood had picked out and not far from the secondary school where she teaches. She lives alone, except for a cat. "This is the place we'd decided to build a new life. This is where I last spent time with him," she said. "I had to be close. And I still expected to hear something. Never did I expect to go this long without knowing."

I MET CAPTAIN Desmond Ross, a leading aviation-security expert, at his local pub in the Pyrmont neighborhood of Sydney. He was born in Belfast, was taught to fly by the Royal Air Force, and has spent most of his career in aviation security, including years in Southeast Asia. He understands, as all aviation professionals understand, that certain protocols should be followed when civilian airliners blink off radar screens. Ho Chi Minh control should have been in contact with Kuala Lumpur within three minutes of MH370 not showing up, preferably two, and most definitely not seventeen. Civilian controllers should have contacted their military counterparts, and there should be a record, written and audio, of those communications. If they

exist, they've never been released.

More important, when unidentified and unresponsive aircraft appear on military screens, fighter jets are supposed to be scrambled. Those pilots are supposed to visually identify the rogue plane, waggle their wings as a signal to land if need be, drift in close if there's no response. "They can look into the cockpit. If the pilot's not there, they can see that. If the pilot's dead, they can see that," Ross said. "This is not rocket science. That is standard operating protocol. Everybody knows it, everybody understands it."

If any of that had happened, the fate of MH370 would likely be known. That those things did not happen leaves, to Ross's mind, a binary choice. "Either incompetence, total dereliction of duty, which amounts to criminal negligence," he said, "or a conspiracy. What else is there?"

He let that hang for a moment. Then: "You have to discard most of the conspiracy theories."

He ticks off the main ones, and a few variations of each. There's no evidence either the pilot or co-pilot was suicidal. "There's no point in hijacking it and not taking credit," he said, "unless they fucked up and they're keeping it under wraps because they want to try again." At that point, nine months after the fact, no one had. And stealing it? "If someone is really believing in this day and age that they can hide an aircraft and 239 people," he said, "they're kidding themselves."

That leaves incompetence, gross dereliction of duty, and so forth. Ross favors that option. Which would explain why questions aren't answered and records aren't released and there are wide, yawning holes in the narrative begging to be filled with conspiracies. "Malaysia's dug themselves a trench because they're trying to save face," he said. "Do not underestimate that, saving face. If that's the case, they've dug themselves such a fucking trench they could bury all of Kuala Lumpur."

A short hop away, in Canberra, Martin Dolan hinted at pretty much the same thing. He is the chief commissioner of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, the ATSB, which is in charge of the search. But he's limited in what he can say. What about, for instance, Indonesian radar? It should have picked up MH370. "It detected nothing...," Dolan started. "Wait, I'm sorry. There was no detection. I have to choose my words carefully. I can't say more about Indonesia, but they are not concealing anything from us." As for Australian radar, he chooses his words even more carefully. "It, ah...wasn't aimed there at that time. And that's all I can say."

Dolan understands that those are the kind of words that breed conspiracies. He also understands bureaucracies. "Speaking as a career public servant," he said, "if you have a choice between a conspiracy and a stuff-up, go with the stuff-up. It's a good rule of thumb."

MALAYSIA AIR FLIGHT 370 is probably at the bottom of the southern Indian Ocean. That is the consensus view, at least, of a great number of technically savvy people, of whom there are far too many to form a coherent conspiracy.

That conclusion is based on the seven handshakes between Inmarsat and the aircraft. The signal for each of those brief data exchanges had to travel from a ground station in Australia to a satellite in space, down to the moving airliner, and then back again (or vice versa for the log-on requests initiated by the aircraft). The signal travels at a fixed speed, so by measuring how long it took to make the round-trip cycle, engineers were able to calculate how far the plane was from the satellite during each handshake.

Those calculations produced seven circles, each centered on the satellite, upon which MH370's possible route could be plotted. For practical reasons—the plane had neither the fuel nor the time to get west of the satellite, for instance—those circles were snipped to arcs, one stretching north from Thailand to Kazakhstan, the other slashing through thousands of miles of empty sea in the south. Assuming the plane went down during or immediately after that final, abbreviated handshake, it would be at a point on or very near one of those long, thin curves.

The next step, then, was to figure out which direction MH370 turned out of the Strait of Malacca, the last point Malaysian military tracked it. Because the aircraft was moving, the frequency of the signal it sent either stretched or compressed on its way to the satellite. It's the same principle, to use the most common example, as a train's whistle seeming to change pitch as it passes. The difference between the frequency the ground station expected to receive and the one it actually did-whether that hypothetical train's howl sounded higher or lower than it does at a standstill-would indicate whether the plane was traveling toward the satellite or away from it and, thus, north or south.

The algorithms to sort all that out had to be developed on the fly. But Inmarsat engineers by mid-March calculated MH370 had rounded the northern tip of Sumatra and then flown south, apparently until it ran out of fuel. Exactly where depended on a number of variables—altitude, speed, winds, the precision of the last turn, whether that even

was the last turn. (The plane "could also have flown around in circles and ended up almost anywhere on the final arc," they noted in a paper published last fall in *The Journal of Navigation*.) But they'd at least placed it along a narrow, if dauntingly long, slice of the Indian Ocean.

Inmarsat engineers are not the only ones to have reached that conclusion. Analysts working for five different governments,

The search is expected to be completed by May.

And if they don't find it? "Then we'll go to the governments and say, 'We've got a problem. A very expensive problem.'"

including the United States, Great Britain, and Australia, have, too, although they differ on precisely which point on the seventh arc is the most likely. Perhaps more important, a number of skeptical civilians with deep expertise in appropriate fields-satellites, avionics, communications technology, and the like-have scoured the data as well. Among the false-flag paranoids and the conspiracy crackpots cluttering the Internet, a few dozen scientists, technicians, and others, including Jeff Wise of the Kazakhstan postulate, last spring self-sorted themselves into something called the Independent Group. They were forced to rely on limited data, cobbled together from public documents and databases. (The IG has never seen Inmarsat's complete data logs.) For the Malaysian military radar track, they used a news photographer's picture of a slide shown at a briefing for the passengers' next of kin. A Lenovo engineer named Bill Holland culled a few columns of unreleased data from the b-roll of a CNN piece on Inmarsat. "This is really reverse engineering in a very, very ugly way," he said.

Between them, the Independent Group members ran the available data through countless flight scenarios of differing speed and altitude, and in September, issued a report arguing MH370 most likely spiraled into the Indian Ocean 1,500 miles southwest of Perth. At the time, the ATSB had its priority search zone 600 miles north on the arc. On October 8, after refining its own analysis, the ATSB moved south, to almost the exact same spot.

This January, four ships were steaming methodically across 23,000 square miles of ocean, bouncing sonar waves off the bottom, which in some places is more than 14,000 feet beneath the surface. Eventually, maybe, one of those signals will hit a large metallic object—say, a Rolls-Royce Trent 892 turbofan engine—and the recovery of MH370 will begin. "We are very confident," Martin Dolan told me, "that if the aircraft is where we've calculated it to be, we'll find it."

The search is expected to be completed by May. And if they don't find it? "Then we'll go to the governments," Dolan said, "and say, 'We've got a problem. A very expensive problem." EARLY ONE MORNING last year, a commercial airliner disappeared over Southeast Asia. It was a big, modern aircraft, well maintained and flown by a seasoned crew on a routine flight. Air-traffic controllers watched it climb out from the airport for almost an hour, a small block of identifying letters and numbers stutter-stepping toward the top of their radar screens.

There was heavy weather in the area, a string of monsoon-season thunderheads. The pilot asked air-traffic control if he could deviate from his assigned route path, which was allowed, and to climb to 38,000 feet, which was not because of other traffic.

Five minutes later, the signal for AirAsia Flight QZ8501 was gone. It blinked off the control screens, and its communication systems went silent, and it was presumed—because this is always the presumption soon after such things occur—that it had fallen out of the sky.

The search, by ships and helicopters and slow, lumbering planes, began in the most logical place, which was where QZ8501 was last known to be. They looked until nightfall and the next day, too, but did not find anything. There is always debris, except for that one time when there wasn't, and suddenly it seemed possible that it was all beginning again.

On that second day, before the wreckage was found, a man named Calvin Shim sent me a text. He lives in the great urban sprawl of Kuala Lumpur, and we'd been trying to connect for weeks, first in Malaysia and then by phone.

"QZ8501 is really a recurrent shock for me," Shim texted. A moment later: "I am available for phone call now."

We spoke mostly about his wife, Christine Tan, who had been a flight attendant with Malaysia Airlines for more than twenty years. She worked long-haul flights to Paris or London, but every so often she flew the red-eye to Beijing. The airline sometimes sent a car to ferry his wife to the airport, but she'd called a cab the night before she left for her final flight. Shim walked her out to say good-bye. Their 6-year-old daughter came with him.

"Mommy," she said as Tan got into the cab, "can I give you one last kiss before you go to work?"

Shim winced inside. "I remember that sentence," he said, "because I didn't feel comfortable." He didn't know why. Now he tells his kids they should always ask for one *more* kiss, never one *last* kiss.

His wife had been gone almost ten months the night he told me that. He wanted to be objective, a realist, to believe what he'd been told, that he hadn't been lied to.

But when nothing is certain, everything is possible. What if one of those other theories, the ones dismissed as conspiracies, is true? What if it landed? How can he know?

He can't. So he pays the bill every month for his wife's cell phone. And when his mother tries to comfort her grandchildren, when she tells them Mommy is in heaven, he gently corrects her: "Don't say their mother's in heaven," he says. "Because we don't know yet."

MEN'S RIGHTS



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Sage opens his eyes. *Women*. "Blair, poetry doesn't have to rhyme." He'll show her. This could be a good line: "You owe her nothing but a view of your back." Sage, notes Blair, pets her thigh. "I'm not angry at women," he explains, "but I'm angry at what they can do. You could put down your book right now and yell 'Rape!' and I would be led away in handcuffs." They think about this. Sage says, "I hope it's okay if I hug you."

Before she can respond, he pulls her in, pulls her up out of her chair, pulls her against his chest, and holds her there. He rubs her back. An embrace Blair will later describe as "the most unconsensual hug I have ever known."

Blair: "I still don't know what to do about the poem."

Sage loosens his grip. "I apologize for dragging you away," he says. "I wasn't going to feel okay until I talked to you." He warns her not to send mixed messages. For instance, she shouldn't put her hand on a man's knee if she doesn't want to have sex with him. Sage puts his hand on Blair's knee. This is not a mixed message, he wants her to understand. She's here, in the VFW. She's taken the red pill. She needs another hug. He needs to give it to her.

ON THE LAST NIGHT of the conference, Sage and Typhon Blue dance in a bar to "Blurred Lines." "This is our song!" cries one MRA. Blair receives several marriage proposals. There's karaoke, AC/DC's "Big Balls" performed twice. And around midnight Blair's boyfriend, Quince, and I join Elam for a private afterparty in his suite. Once it's determined that girls are allowed, Blair joins, too. Factory is there with his girlfriend, Lori, and there's Tara Palmatier, Psy.D., the "Shrink 4 Men," and a skinny old hippie with a thin gray ponytail and a belt buckle that says JAZZ, whom I will call Jazz. We all drink mudslides.

Elam is pleased by the entrance of another female. Sitting next to him with her hands folded in her lap, Blair seems like a student, ready to learn.

"Tell me why you're here," Elam says, his voice soft. He fixes her with a gaze that says, "I really want to listen to you."

"I'm interested in hard conversations," she says.

She walked into that one. Factory guffaws. "This is as hard as it gets," he says.

"I'm curious," Elam says. "What did your friends think when you told them you were coming here?"

"To be honest?" Blair asks. Elam nods. She says, "I had friends who said I'd get raped."

Blink. You can almost see the struggle in Elam's bones: Play the nice guy? Or the perv? No question. "All right!" he booms, swinging his arms together. "Let's get started!"

Jazz winces.

"Get the video camera!" Factory yells at his girlfriend, who giggles weakly.

I should be very clear here: At no point does it seem like Elam or Factory is actually going to rape Blair. We know they're joking. Just a couple of middle-aged guys joking around about rape with a young woman they've never met before in a hotel room at one in the morning.

"What surprised me," Blair says, "was how warm people were."

She's found Elam's hinge: He launches into reminiscing about the days just past, about the camaraderie, the brotherly love. "I'm seriously choked up about it." he says.

"I am, too," says Factory. Factory appreciates Blair's generous observation. She's a "labia traitor." That's a good thing.

The night winds on, with discussion of rape and the smothering of penises, the sorrows of false accusations and the narcissism of young girls. A sore point for Factory, who has two daughters, who, like young women everywhere, he says, compete for the most exaggerated rape claim. It is, he says, a status thing. When one of his daughters came home one night and said she'd been raped, he said, "Are you fucking kidding me?" Sitting with us, he hikes his voice up to a falsetto in imitation: "Oh, I just got raped." He laughs. There's a moment of silence. A bridge too far? "I told her if she pressed charges, I'd disown her."

Elam, whose attention has drifted, grins through his beard. "That's good fathering," he says.

Factory loves his children. He would have reacted differently if it had been what he in theory considers a legitimate claim, but—"if you don't have videotape or forensic, a whole lot of bruises, I don't give a fuck."

We move on to the topics of weak-willed men and the mothers who make them such, of cowards and pickup artists—pathetic, thinks Elam, who says game comes naturally to a man who knows he's a man. It's getting late. We've run out of Kahlúa. Jazz is growing a little trippy about feminism and "the end of the human race." Elam and Factory slip out onto the balcony for a smoke. I follow. We look into the darkness of St. Clair Shores and the lake beyond, three men smoking in the damp air before dawn.

When we return to the room, Elam and Factory are giddy, horsing around, teasing Blair. "Your last line," Elam tells me, "should be, 'Then we got the munchies, and Paul said, "Bitch, go get me a sandwich." 'He's joking, more satire, because right now his brotherly love extends to ladies with a sense of humor. He would never ask a *bitch* to make him a sandwich. But seriously, he says. Seriously.

And that's when Elam draws me my diagram. The Dick & Balls. He doesn't mean to draw the Dick & Balls, but he does. It is a sign. "Yes," says Elam, "I guess it is." He smiles. Everyone smiles. We are high in the manosphere now, the great phallic oversoul, the red pills are working, the rape jokes no longer land like bombshells, they're like the weather, ordinary as rain. We've made it: the dream world of Elam, where men are men, no matter how broken.

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KOBE BRYANT



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of having one of those great, bonding friendships—that's something I will probably never have. And it's not some smug thing. It's a weakness. It's a weakness.

Do you miss the idea of having a great friendship?

Of course. It's not like I'm saying, 'I don't need friends because I'm so strong.' It's a weakness. When I was growing up in Italy, I grew up in isolation. It was not an environment suited to me. I was the only black kid. I didn't speak the language. I'd be in one city, but then we'd move to a different city and I'd have to do everything again. I'd make friends, but I'd never be part of the group, because the other kids were already growing up together. So this is how I grew up, and these are the weaknesses that I have.

"I'VE SHOT TOO MUCH from the time I was 8 years old," Bryant says when we discuss his critics. "But 'too much' is a matter of perspective. Some people thought Mozart had too many notes in his compositions. Let me put it this way: I *entertain* people who say I shoot too much. I find it very interesting. Going back to Mozart, he responded to critics by saying there were neither too many notes or too few. There were as many as necessary."

Assuming he spends the rest of this season in rehab, Bryant will finish his nineteenth year in the league with 32,482 points, roughly 6,000 fewer than the NBA's all-time leader, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. He expresses no interest whatsoever in that record: "I could play for five or six more years if I wanted to. But I don't. This year and next year is enough. If my goal had been going after Jabbar, I would have done that. I would have gone to a different team and scored thirty-seven points* a game. But that was never my goal. My goal is to sit at the table with Michael and Magic, having won the same number of titles."

That sentiment, of course, raises an inescapable conflict: If Bryant's only goal is winning championships, it makes no sense for him to continue playing in Los Angeles. The team is terrible. But Bryant thinks this is a temporary condition. And while his argument seems implausible, his reasoning is as sublime as it is conspiratorial.

*I find it amusing that—earlier in the conversation— Bryant had said he could have averaged thirty-five points a game if he'd gone to a different team. Twenty minutes later, the number he gives is thirty-seven. Somehow he managed to increase his hypothetical nightly average by a basket, just by giving this interview. The Lakers are not going to make the playoffs this year, and it seems unlikely that they will challenge for a title next year. So if titles are your only goal, why even play these last two seasons?

I know what Mitch [Kupchak, the Lakers G.M.] tells me. I know what Jim and Jeanie [Buss, the team's owners] tell me. I know that they are hell-bent about having a champion-ship-caliber team next season, as am I.

But how could that possibly be done? Doesn't the league's financial system dictate certain limitations?

Well, okay: Look at the [2011] lockout. That lockout was made to restrict the Lakers. It was. I don't care what any other owner says. It was designed to restrict the Lakers and our marketability.

The Lakers specifically, or teams like the Lakers?

There is only one team like the Lakers. Everything that was done with that lockout was to restrict the Lakers' ability to get players and to create a sense of parity for the San Antonios and Sacramentos of the world. But a funny thing happened, coming out of that lockout: Even with those restrictions, the Lakers pulled off a trade [for Chris Paul] that immediately set us up for a championship, a run of championships later, and which saved money. Now, the NBA vetoed that trade. But the Lakers pulled that shit off, and no one would have thought it was even possible. The trade got vetoed, because they'd just staged the whole lockout to restrict the Lakers. Mitch got penalized for being smart. But if we could do that...

Bryant is arguing that the Lakers will just *manufacture* a competitive roster, through sheer intellectual creativity. Unrestricted free agent LaMarcus Aldridge may be in play. Rajon Rondo (with whom Bryant recently had breakfast) might be on the table. It all seems hopeless, but stranger things have happened. Now, do I totally believe Kobe on this? I'm not sure if I totally believe Kobe. But I know that I want to, and I know that he believes himself. He believes he can do anything, simply through the power of will.

In 2011, Bryant's wife, Vanessa, filed for divorce, citing irreconcilable differences. Yet those differences were reconciled, thirteen months later. They remain a married couple. "I'm not going to say our marriage is perfect, by any stretch of the imagination," Kobe says. "We still fight, just like every married couple. But you know, my reputation as an athlete is that I'm extremely determined, and that I will work my ass off. How could I do that in my professional life if I wasn't like that in my personal life, when it affects my kids? It wouldn't make any sense." The logic is weirdly airtight: If we concede that Kobe would kill himself to beat the Celtics, we must assume he'd be equally insane about keeping his family together. And he knows that we know this about him, so he uses that to his advantage.

He knows who he is. He really, really does. ❖

CHUCK KLOSTERMAN is the author of eight books, most recently I Wear the Black Hat: Grappling with Villains (Real and Imagined).

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

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I CON PARTING SHOT 6 16 Sweet 16 Guy Who Keeps Saying Coppin State Is "Dangerous" Guy Who Always Chooses the 12–5 Upsets Correctly Sad Bastard Who Never, Ever Wins Guy Who Just Steals Obama's Bracket Guy Who Enters Empty Bracket Despite 371 Reminders Unrepentant Duke Homer The Intern You! 12 Elite 8 Miraculously, Sad Bastard Who Never Wins Goddamn Duke Homer The Intern ("Nice going... James?") You! 10 8 Of Course It's the Guy Who Never Wins. Of Fucking Course. Final 4 Hell Yeah, Intern! 10 **HE NGAA TOURNA** GUY WHO NEVER aggravating co-worker will take O 0 Sixteen of March Sadness. (We see you, Goddamn Duke Homer) Placeyour bets on which the potin this Sweet BARRY, THAT GUY NO ONE KNOWS Serge Seidlitz BARRY, SHOW YOURSELF! Final 4 Does Barry Even Work Here? Asshat Who Never Pays ("I'll get you after lunch, promise.") Asshat Who Never Pays ("Why would I have a PayPal account?!") Friend of the Bracket Czar ("Awkwaaard.") Is Barry the Mailroom Guy? Lady Jay Bilas

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